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OUTRUN 2006 COAST 2 COAST

Exclusive review: Sega shifts up a gear but will the new model pass the gamesTM road test?

180 PAGES: THE RIDE OFYOUR LIFE

HIGHLIGHTS

- ONIMUSHA: DAWN OF DREAMS [PS2]
- KINGDOM HEARTS II [PS2]
- VIRTUA FIGHTER 5 [ARC]
- DEVIL MAY CRY 4 [PS3]
- FULL AUTO [360]
- ROGUE GALAXY [PS2]

REVIEWED

BLACK

Has Criterion turbo-charged the first-person shooter?

FEATURE

XBOX 360 LIVE TEST

The first wave of 360 titles reviewed and rated


eMag

We'd like to think that much of what **games™** stands for is simply us preaching to the choir – we're gamers like you, as much as we are journalists, so the games we cover are the ones we feel we'd like to read about too. Sometimes, of course, it doesn't quite go according to plan (clearly, not as many of you are as excited about Capcom's Okami as we'd hoped… shame on you all), but nevertheless, we feel it's important to push the games that deserve your attention, not just the titles that everyone's going to buy regardless. And that's why the shiny red loveliness that is *OutRun* is gracing the cover this month, purely because it's more than worthy of it. That the original Xbox game was all but ignored is a crime, but then it's just another example of a quality title going unloved and unappreciated by the masses. It's not exactly a short list either. *Ico*, *Prince Of Persia: Sands Of Time*, *Devil Dice*, *Viewtiful Joe*… all games that find themselves in the same boat, stranded out in the middle of the gaming ocean. They deserve to be rescued. And thankfully, with *Coast 2 Coast*, Sega's giving you all a chance to throw a lifesaver. Won't someone heed the call for help? Please.

Martin Mathers
Editor




ROUND
4-1





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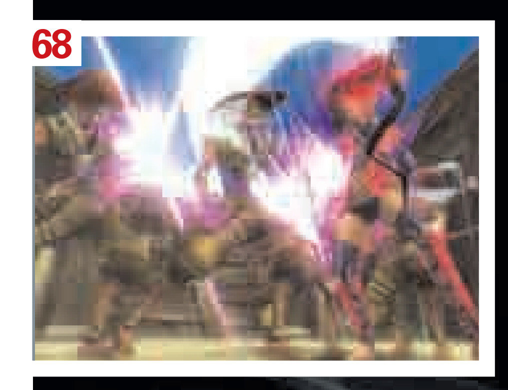
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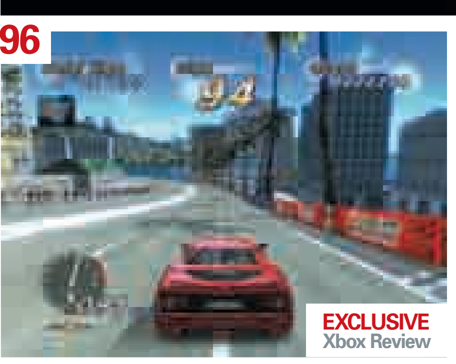
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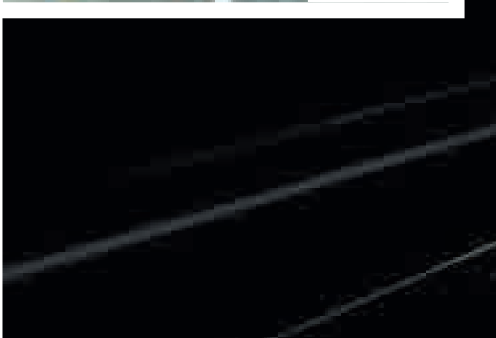
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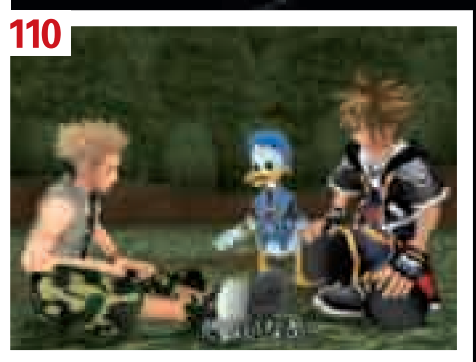
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EXCLUSIVE
Xbox Review



110





104 Black

Criterion ditches fast cars and turbo boosts in favour of semi-automatics and rocket launchers. Awesome

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ROLL WITH THE PUNCHES

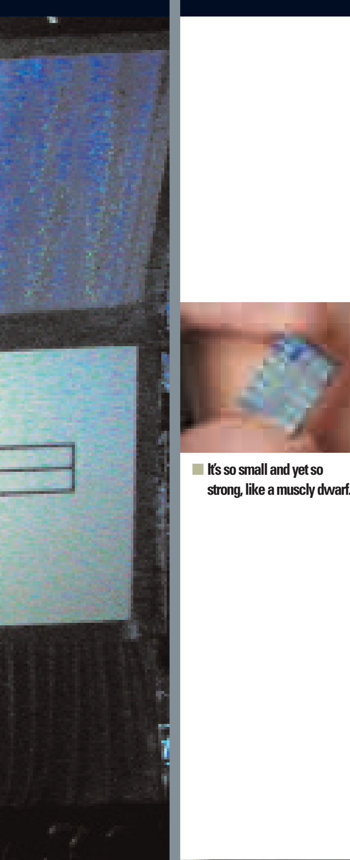
SONY FIGHTS BACK

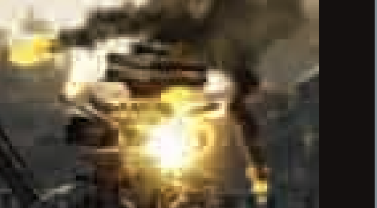
It was perhaps with an air of inevitability that we listened to Kaz Hirai's cutting comments regarding Microsoft's Xbox 360 strategy. The Sony Computer Entertainment America chief has never held back when it comes to discussing his competitors, and no one was surprised when he pointed out that Microsoft's 'early to market' plans were somewhat flawed earlier this month.

"People, especially people up north on the west coast, seem to put a lot of credence on being out before the other consoles," he said in an interview with the America's Official PlayStation Magazine. A dig at Microsoft's Seattle-based operation, without a doubt.

"If you take a look at when our competitors came out in the market," Hirai continues, "we had upwards of 3 to 5 million PS2 units when they came out with a platform. Consumers adopted our platform because [they like our content] and not because we were first to market. First to market, from what we can tell, has never been an advantage."

Hirai also downplayed the PS3's potential technological superiority over the Xbox 360, preferring, instead, to





focus on software. "The technological advantage is almost a given, but by itself, it doesn't mean very much. What kind of software do you have to help drive that technological innovation? We've proven over the past ten years – with three products – that we can deliver, whether it's first-party or third-party support," he said.

Clearly Hirai is buoyant about PlayStation3's chances, and given Sony's immense track record, he has every right to be. However, with very little software to actually back up his own claims, and continuing worries over release dates, price, and the machine's controller, it's going to take more than a few choice words to sway the Microsoft faithful over to Sony's way of thinking. Still, with the Cell chip nearing completion, and an impending E3, the PlayStation3 hype machine is moving up through the gears extremely rapidly, and Bill Gates and co are sure to be sitting a little less comfortably as more and more information is revealed.

"**FIRST** TO MARKET, FROM WHAT **WE** CAN TELL, HAS **NEVER** BEEN AN **ADVANTAGE**"

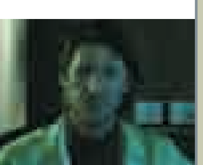
THE POWER OF THREE

WHAT IS KNOWN ABOUT THE PS3 SO FAR…

It's so small and yet so strong, like a muscly dwarf.

CELL ON EARTH

The key to the PlayStation3's potential success lies with Sony's brand spanking new Cell processor. It's rumoured to be more powerful than Godzilla and more important than Jesus, and the new chip could now be set to take over (possibly the world) when it materialises later this year. Kenshi Manabe, Sony's semi-conductor chief, told a group of financial analysts, "The Cell chip is as good as the Pentium, if not better." We're assuming that he doesn't mean the original Pentium rather than the latest iteration, otherwise it's going to be pretty rubbish. However, if this chip is as successful as Sony expects it to be, it could well give it a profitable advantage in all areas of consumer electronics, as cameras, phones and, of course, consoles could all be powered without using chips from an outside source.



Oh, Otakon – you're so old. And wise, too. Yes, wise.

SOLID AS A ROCK

By far the most anticipated title that's going to be coming out on the PlayStation3 is the final instalment of Kojima's phenomenal *Metal Gear Solid* opus, subtitled *Guns Of The Patriots*. The trailer, which was screened at last year's Tokyo Game Show, has had fans of the prolific action adventure series fainting with excitement. Graphically, this one outshines everything else. Ever. It has not actually been confirmed yet, though, whether any part of the video which was screened is actually going to be seen in the game, but Kojima maintains that it is representative of the final product. With a future war setting, a dying snake, and massive robots with human legs, *Metal Gear Solid 4* literally cannot arrive soon enough.



Please, please… don't let this be the final design.

BANANARAMA

After witnessing the streamlined piece of pure sleek that is the Xbox 360's gorgeous wireless pad, the initial prototype for the next-generation DualShock pad was certainly a touch bizarre. It looked just like a curiously banana-shaped version of the DualShock2, although it looked like it had been knocked up for 40 pence by someone who'd failed his job interview at Joytech. Kaz Hirai, Sony Computer Entertainment America chief, has made it clear that the obscure-sounding device is not the finished article, explaining that, "it's a work in progress. We certainly want to make sure that when you hold it in your hands that you've come home to something familiar."

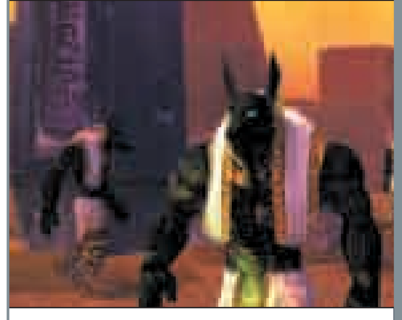
Data stream

BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



WOW-ZERS

Shortly after Blizzard's BlizzCon fan event, *World Of Warcraft* hit 5 million subscribers worldwide following the game's Asian launch last November. This officially makes it the world's most popular RPG, therefore providing you with a talking point with almost any other gamer around the world. The first expansion pack, *Burning Crusade*, is due this year and will likely rejuvenate lapsing player interest with new maps, quests and monsters as well as a level 70 cap, giving us even more of an excuse to waste our sorry lives in front of screens.



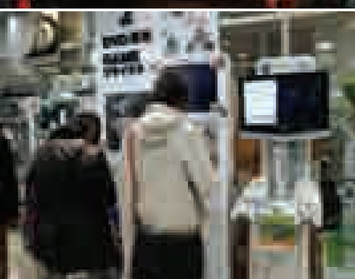
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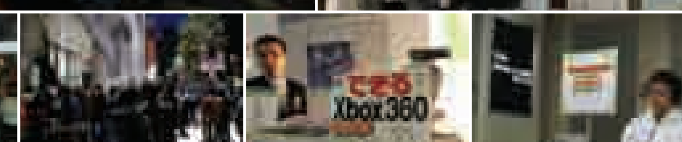
Alan Gelfand, inventor of the 'ollie' skateboard trick in 1977, is seeking $20 million damages from Sega and Activision for copyright infringement. He didn't name games, but Sega's arcade title *Ollie King* and Activision's *Disney's Extreme Skate Adventure* (featuring an area called Olliewood, also the name of one of Gelfand's ramps) are likely targets. Activision published the *Tony Hawk's* games, too, but as these have always been fully licensed it's unlikely that Gelfand would be claiming in those instances.

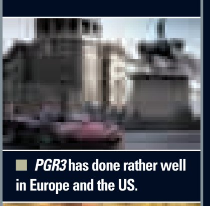




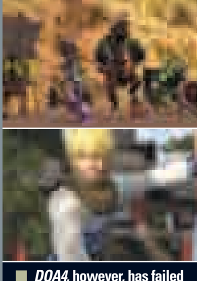




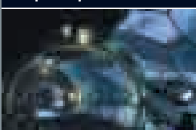




PGR3 has done rather well in Europe and the US.



DOA4, however, has failed to spark Japanese sales.



And as for *Perfect Dark Zero*… well, don't start.

360 DAYS

STOCK SHORTAGES, A DISASTROUS JAPANESE LAUNCH, BUT STILL THE FASTEST SELLING CONSOLE IN UK HISTORY…

The initial furore of the Xbox 360 launch has died down and it's time to take an objective look at one of the highest profile console launches in the history of videogames. After months of speculation surrounding pre-orders, stock shortages and software slips, the 360 finally hit British stores on 2 December together with a multi-million pound advertising campaign asking consumers to 'Jump In'.

Unsurprisingly, given the phenomenal hype that surrounded the machine, it has gone on to become the fastest selling home console in the UK at launch. Final figures are yet to be confirmed, but UK chart data firm ChartTrack has announced that the 360 has, indeed, broken the record previously held by Nintendo's GameCube in 2003. However, across Europe it's likely that the big N has held onto its overall territory record, due to the fact that there just weren't enough 360s available to supply demand – roughly 300,000 units were shipped for day one, as opposed to the Cube's 400,000.

With many people failing to get a launch machine (despite pre-ordering) and the bare minimum of Core units being available on shelves, there's an argument that the launch was something of a shambles, despite the healthy sales figures. According to potential customers posting on forums, machines pre-ordered online as early as September were not received. As a result, many have chosen instead to get on eBay or scan websites, desperately searching for the last few remaining machines in the country.

It's been quite a different story in Japan. Xbox has been notoriously unsuccessful in the east, with a number of factors contributing to the region's lack of interest: the machine's size, its non-Japanese origins and a lack of eastern-friendly software. However, Microsoft hoped that with the 360's improved styling and large group of Japanese development talent on board (including Tetsuya Mizuguchi of *Rez* and *Lumines* fame, *Final Fantasy's* Hironobu Sakaguchi and **games™** favourite Yoshiki Okamoto), the machine would fare somewhat better. Unfortunately, the launch didn't go exactly to plan, with only 28 per cent of consoles shipped to the territory being sold, which translates to a meagre 62,000 units – far less than the 123,000 units sold by the original Xbox upon its launch.

This proved vexing for consumers in the west, who were faced with a 360-less Christmas, as photos flooded back from Japan featuring shelves filled with 360s. Doubly irritating was the fact that Microsoft



A YEAR

priced the Japanese machine considerably lower than in the west. In fact, it's possible to pick up the Premium unit in Japan for little more than the price of a western Core (sometimes less, considering the amount of discounting we saw in Osaka). Undoubtedly, this is embarrassing for Microsoft, as it already seems the 360 could well be heading for third place in the next-gen battle in the orient.

Back in the UK, the machine's future looks a lot brighter. Despite a few teething problems, the response from early adopters has been extremely positive, with Microsoft's Peter Moore pointing out that, "more than half of [360 owners] are connecting to the Xbox Live community; a monumental leap from the one out of every ten people that enjoyed online multiplayer games on the original Xbox." Online integration is the key to the 360's success, and at the moment is second to none. Unless Sony can conjure something magnificent with its PS3 online service, Microsoft will be leading the way in this most important of areas. The battle for next-generation supremacy has finally begun.

"CONSUMERS IN THE WEST FACED A **360-LESS CHRISTMAS** WHILE 360S FILLED THE SHELVES **IN JAPAN"**

HD ACHE



Bill Gates, Microsoft chairman and owner of 41 per cent of the world, has announced that the Xbox 360 is to support HD-DVD technology, in the form of an external drive. Speaking at his keynote address ahead of the CES show in Las Vegas, Gates cleared up months of speculation surrounding his machine's support for Toshiba's HD-DVD technology – a direct competitor to Sony's Blu-ray which the PlayStation3 will be using as standard.



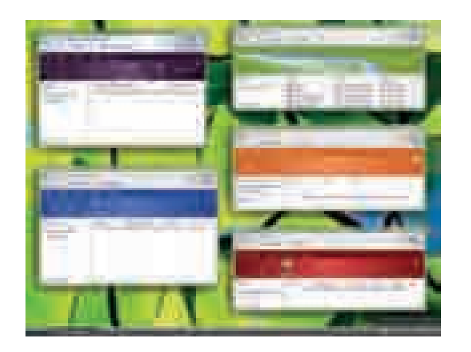
WINDOWS HACKING STORY

CERTAINLY NOT PICTURE PERFECT

If you're a gamer who's into PC gaming, then there's a pretty strong likelihood that you have spent a fair amount of spare readies on protecting your beloved machine in the past. Well, now there seems to be another way for hacking types to get into your computer and ruin all your fun. Microsoft has recently acknowledged that a weakness has been discovered in Microsoft Windows (yes, that's another one) that allows evil, horrible people to remotely access PCs and install malware. Certainly not the best news we've had all month.

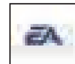
This time, its pictures that are causing the problems. The image-handling technology in the operating system gives those nasty hackers the opportunity to use arbitrary code when internet surfers visit a site that contains a WMF image. This turns any site that contains images into a possible risk.

Microsoft is currently investigating the problem and will be providing a security update as soon as possible, but until things are completely sorted out, we're being advised to make use of our common sense. That means things like being extra cautious when opening emails from people who you've never heard of and not clicking on any of those suspicious money-promising links. Also, **games™** would like to ask you never to accept sweets from strangers, place metallic items in your microwave oven and not to use knives to 'stab' stuck bread from your toaster. Thank you.



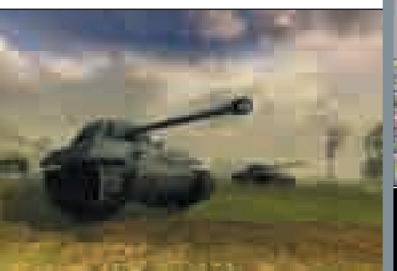
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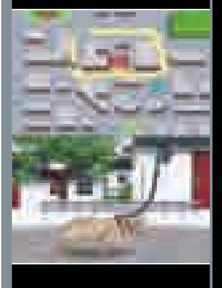
BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING

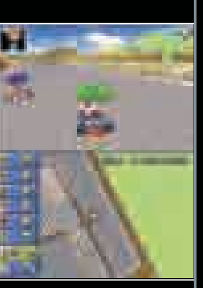


TANKS A LOT

As part of its education initiative, EA is challenging UK university students to create an AI build for a tank battle game. The winners will receive new PCs, EA PC games and the chance to meet the developers of the *Battlefield* titles. The students will be provided free software and will retain the rights to their intellectual property. We're pleased, as this is less amoral than encouraging young talent to work for the military, but still involves tanks.







The DS is going on a diet. Are pockets getting smaller or something?

LITE BYTE

REDESIGNED DS TO HIT JAPAN IN MARCH

After weeks of speculation, Nintendo has finally confirmed that the Nintendo DS is to receive a redesign. The new, slimmed-down handheld console will hit Japanese shelves as early as 2 March.

Despite rumours suggesting the machine would, indeed, be redesigned, many had given up hope after Nintendo UK boss David Yarnton was quoted as saying, "We have no plans at the moment – nothing I know of," when quizzed about the potential re-imagining of the DS. Amusingly, he even went as far as joking that his staff would 'probably throttle' him if they did have to deal with a console re-launch on top of the current Nintendo line up.

Just a few short days after these comments, the redesign was formally confirmed on Nintendo's Japanese website, accompanied by an image of a streamlined, sleeker version of the DS, in 'iPod white' as opposed to the original's rather dull grey.

The DS Lite, as it's being called, weighs in at an extremely light 215g. This is a full 60g (nearly 21 per cent) lighter than the standard unit, and will be some 42 per cent smaller, due to a vast decrease in the unit's width.

So far, the changes seem largely cosmetic, dispelling reports that the new DS would support voice communication and IP telephony. Most obvious among the changes is the PSP-style adjustable brightness setting



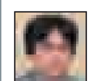
for the screen, allowing for four different levels of light (particularly useful for saving battery power).

Gone is the power button, presumably now hidden on the side of the console, and the mic has been relocated to the hinge between the screens for much easier blowing and screaming.

The DS Lite is shaping up as a very attractive piece of kit and a clever way for Nintendo to capitalise on the handheld market that the PSP has expanded. Undoubtedly, it's completely unnecessary for anyone who already owns a DS, but since when was that ever an issue for the hardware fanatic?

> "THE NEW **SLIMMED-DOWN HANDHELD** CONSOLE WILL HIT **JAPANESE SHELVES** AS EARLY AS 2 MARCH"

Data Stream
BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING

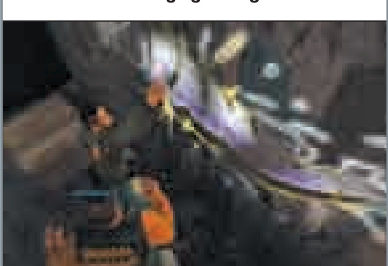


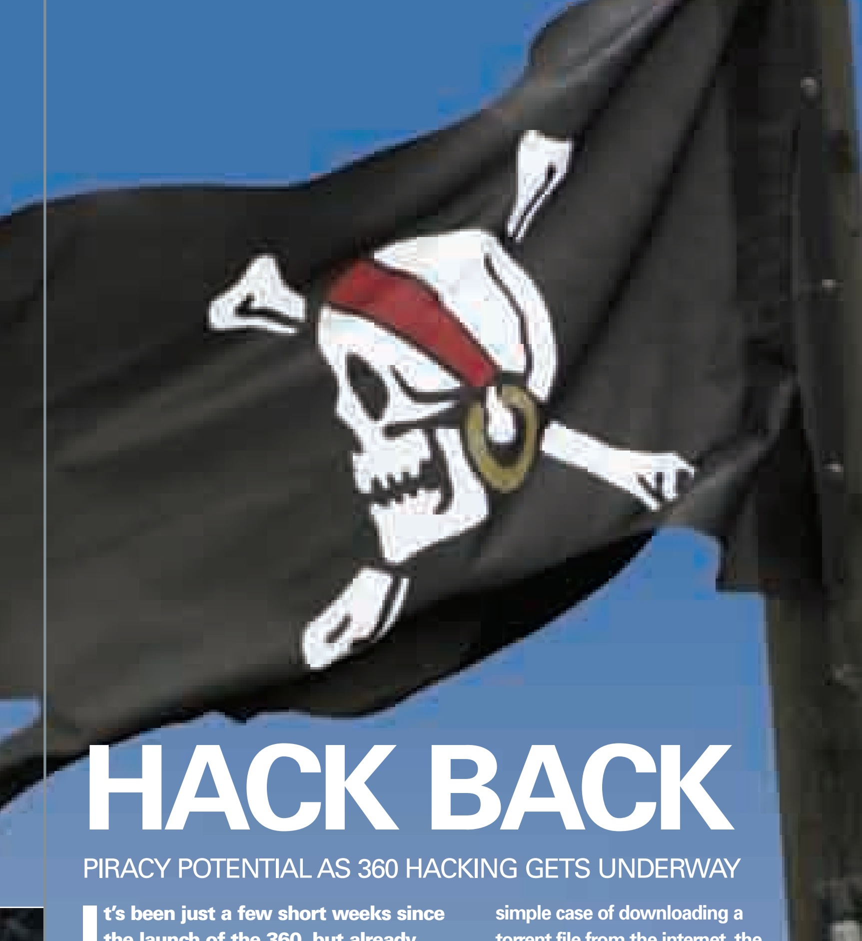
SAVE YOUR PENNIES
In an interview with Yahoo! Japan this month, Nintendo president Satoru Iwata stated that the Revolution would be the lowest-priced competitor on the next-gen market, adding that it would be 'much less expensive' than the $300 360 Core pack. Some estimate the price at a very economical $150 following the company's claims that its console will appeal to a new audience. Leaked info also suggests the Revolution will be a lot less meaty than either of the other two competitors. A bargain price, though, could offset the differences in power.





BAN THIS SICK FILTH
Leaping onto the 'videogames make Jesus weep fat, salty tears' bandwagon this month was a group of Florida MPs who claim the upcoming *Marc Ecko* game will encourage youngsters to become reckless graffiti vandals (possibly while also taking drugs). The group called for an Atari-funded anti-graffiti campaign and for consumers to boycott the product. The mayor of New York has already tried to prevent an Ecko-sponsored street graffiti challenge on similar grounds, but a judge ruled that his objections were equivalent to saying, "a street performance of Hamlet would be tantamount to encouraging revenge murder".





HACK BACK

PIRACY POTENTIAL AS 360 HACKING GETS UNDERWAY

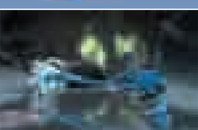
It's been just a few short weeks since the launch of the 360, but already hackers have made inroads into cracking the new console's code. A Dutch hacker group, referring to itself as Team PI Coder, has worked out how to 'dump' the contents of game discs for the system. The group has posted details of the file system for the game discs on internet sites, along with a program to extract files from them.

This could result in the eventual cracking of the 360's security, and the creation of mod chips. Of course, there's no physical way of running copied or unauthorised code on the machine, although this may already be in jeopardy as another route to potential 'crackdom' has already opened up.

According to internet sources, the discs that are playing on Xbox 360 demo pods nationwide are, in fact, completely free from region and copy protection, meaning that crafty hackers could potentially use the files on these discs to create a boot program that would bypass protection code.

Should this become a reality, it'd be highly embarrassing for Microsoft which has invested much time and effort into protecting the console from hackers. If it becomes a simple case of downloading a torrent file from the internet, the company could find itself set to lose a fair amount of revenue down to little more than an oversight. So far, no one has managed to bypass security.

Considering that the original Xbox's weak security and PC-style architecture led it to be one of the most hacked consoles ever, MS claims to have significantly increased the security of the 360. However, there's an inevitability about the eventual cracking of the system. Every major console gets hacked, the latest example being the PSP, and regardless of Microsoft's more rigorous security measures, it's very likely that we'll see hacked 360s in the coming months. What happens then, of course, is anyone's guess, but considering the current feeling for Microsoft's inflated game prices (the minimum RRP on the high street for most games is still around £44.99), we suspect more people than usual might turn to the dark side.



Game dumps have already appeared on the internet, although there's no way to actually play them. Yet.



"MICROSOFT COULD **LOSE A FAIR AMOUNT** OF **REVENUE DOWN** TO A SIMPLE **OVERSIGHT**"


eMag

Data Stream

BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



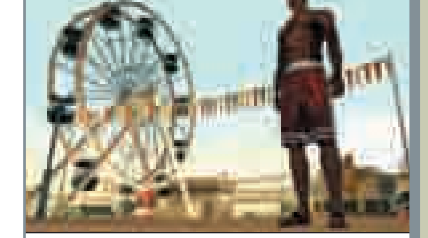
NEW YEAR HONOURS

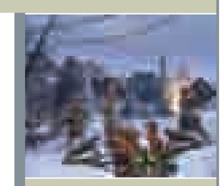
Ian Livingstone has been recognised on the New Year honours list for services to the videogames industry. He was awarded an OBE for his contribution to the British games scene. After founding Games Workshop, he continued to work in that area for a number of years and edited *White Dwarf* magazine which he launched himself. He then became deputy chairman of Domark and, when the company merged with Eidos, retained a crucial role. He's now working with SCi as a product acquisition director.



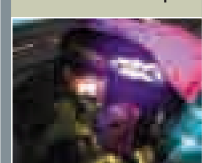
ROCKSTAR FACES THE MUSIC

An Alabama court has decided that the case against Take2, Rockstar and others, which was filed by the families of two police officers who were murdered by a *Grand Theft Auto*-loving teenager, will still come to court. Despite the fact that Jack Thompson has been dismissed from the case (and, indeed, banned from practising law in Alabama), he still seems to think that he'll be playing a role on the witness stand. He announced that he wrote to Take2 years ago warning of the dangers of *GTA*, and claims that ignoring his warning made the company liable for 'huge punitive damages'. Bless.



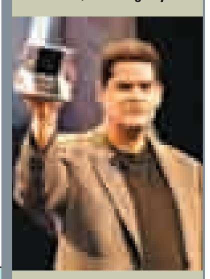


Nintendo did it. Sony did it. Hell, maybe Gates will go one better and squeeze an Xbox onto the head of a pin.





Mr Fils-Aime, aka Big-Face McGee. He takes names and occasionally kicks ass, too. Allegedly.



XPOD

MICROSOFT CONSIDERS ENTERING THE HANDHELD CONSOLE MARKET



Microsoft has always denied rumours of having any interest in the blossoming handheld console market. Nevertheless, news has emerged that the multi-billion dollar powerhouse could well be interested in developing a handheld machine under the Xbox brand.

According to US website Business Week, the company has enlisted a team to examine the pros and cons of this idea, and although Xbox chief Peter Moore (pictured) would not confirm this, he has said that if such a device was to enter the development stage, "it can't just be our version of the iPod".

This suggests that any machine Microsoft should decide to produce would play games as well as other media (music and movies), backed up by Moore's comments that the "[Xbox] brand is an opportunity".

At the moment, it's still unknown whether such a product will ever see the light of day. However, when you consider the continuing success of Sony's remarkable portable PlayStation and Nintendo's dinky DS, as well as the vast fortune that the popular iPod has brought to Apple, Bill Gates and co are hardly unlikely to want to get in on a piece of the action. However, given that Microsoft already makes a profit from selling handheld editions of Windows to hardware developers for use on PDA systems, there's definitely no guarantee that a miniature Xbox will ever hit the market.

REVOLUTION TO TARGET CASUAL USERS

REGGIE SPEAKS OUT



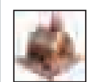
At the 33rd annual UBS Global Media conference held in December, Reggie Fils-Aime, Nintendo of America's bubblegum-chewing chief marketing officer has spoken out about the importance of targeting a new demographic. "If we cannot expand the market, all we can do is wait for the industry to slowly die," he said, stressing the importance of targeting families and female players with the Revolution.

Fils-Aime highlighted that targeting 18-24 year-old male gamers would be foolish, reinforcing Nintendo's intention to go for atypical gamers. *Nintendogs* attracted twice as many female gamers as usual according to Nintendo, and the DS has had a more diverse audience (although that's often true of handhelds). Behind the self-congratulatory Nintendo endorsement quotes from the industry, included in Fils-Aime's speech was a very relevant message for today's industry: no matter how people might bemoan the gimmicky nature of devices like the DS and Revolution controller, without such accessible gameplay encouraging new gamers to the fold, it would be very easy for videogame audiences to simply stagnate.


eMag

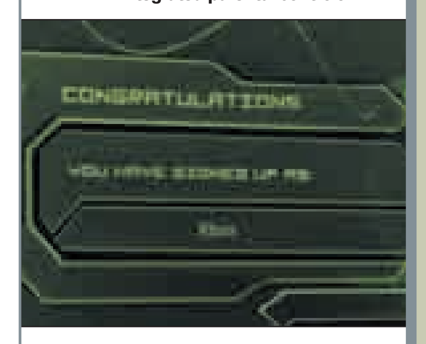
Data Stream

BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING

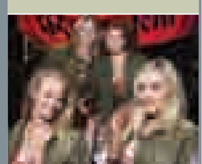


SAFE AND SECURE

A 26 year-old man in California has been accused of using Xbox Live to harass a boy of 14 and later molest him. Allegedly, he contacted the child via Microsoft's online service and then sent him emails and lewd images of himself. The boy agreed to meet with the man, having given him his home phone number and address. Microsoft has, so far, declined to comment, but as protecting children in an online environment gains import in this day and age, console manufacturers are being looked upon to ensure a secure service, such as the Xbox 360's integrated parental controls.



MORE VIDEOGAME MOVIES ON THE HORIZON



Wolfenstein: The Movie – like *The Producers*, only far less camp. With more guns.

SIGHT AND SOUND



We've had *Doom*, and are sitting tight waiting for *Silent Hill*, Peter Jackson's *Halo* and Uwe Boll's potentially masterful *Dungeon Siege*. But now, the latest Hollywood trend is set to plunder more videogaming IPs to create mainstream popcorn cinema. MTV Films has snapped up the rights to produce a film based on *Mark Ecko's Getting Up: Contents Under Pressure*, to be distributed by Paramount Pictures. "Today, graffiti is a global cultural phenomenon and few understand its impact better than MTV," says Ecko. "I am delighted to have the ability to bring the depth of our story to life on film."

"Our next order of business is to try to get *Wolfenstein* made into a movie," said id software CEO Todd Hollenshead in a recent interview. "I think it could make a very interesting film. Where we'd go from a movie standpoint would be to incorporate a lot of elements from *Return To Castle Wolfenstein* along with what we're going to be doing in the next *Wolfenstein* game that we announced a few weeks ago." Sadly, we can see every videogame licence being drained by Hollywood until it moves on to the next identikit trend. However, with both *Silent Hill* and *Halo* aided by the backing of a strong production outfit, the future for videogame movies is not as bleak as it could be.

"say what you see"

Meaningless waffle from the industry

THIS MONTH John Buchanan, EA's head of university research liaisons, tells us about EA's 'programme-a-tank game' competition:

"With this competition, we hope to find people with a passion for AI, and understanding of the magic that makes a game truly fun to play"

games™ says: The winner could find themselves developing the next *Catwoman* or maybe *FIFA Street*. 'Magic and fun to play'? Don't make us laugh.

MORE FROM MR CHIPS NEXT MONTH!

16 YEAR-OLD ARRESTED FOR HARASSING JACK THOMPSON

JACKIN' UP

A Texan teenager has been arrested for harassing anti-videogame campaigner Jack Thompson. The unnamed boy threatened him with torture, the specifics of which are, "so grotesque that they cannot be properly placed in this news release," said Thompson in a statement sent out to various news services and politicians.

"The torture," he continued, "was to end with the shooting of Thompson, as in this teen's favourite games." Quite why Mr Thompson is referring to himself in the third person is anyone's guess; we can only assume he's a big fan of The Rock (the wrestler, not the film).

Thompson claims that the boy was arrested at his high school by the Harris County sheriff's office after he submitted a tape of a phone call as evidence. This case will obviously add more fuel to Thompson's tirade on videogames as he continues to find tenuous links between videogaming and the ills of society. It certainly doesn't help when the maniacs of the world decide to carry out their own personal attacks on him.

"THE **TORTURE** WAS TO END WITH THE **SHOOTING** OF THOMPSON"


eMag



LETTER FROM AMERICA

WITH YOUR FRIENDLY EX-PATRIOT, THE SHAPE

Damn psychologists – always asking questions. Bring back phrenology, that's what we say.

"I ENDED UP FLANKED BY A RETIRED PSYCHOLOGIST AND A IN SEEKING MY QUALIFICATION OF THE ENTIRE VIDEOGAMES

As you age, the number of dinner parties you attend goes up while the fun quotient for each goes down. Every one is survived less certainly than the last, no thanks to dreadful company nor violently disagreeable food consumed out of an odd mix of embarrassment and duty.

Given that mingling with stuffy strangers is as awkward as it is unrewarding, it's a game of mine to avoid as much of it as possible. Predators develop new tactics to catch elusive prey, and inevitably I am caught out. Before you know it, I'm shaking hands, pretending I'd like to know more about the shipping industry and swallowing hors d'oeuvres that evidently wrestled their way out of their last human host.

I had already spotted the cat I'd been promised on the car ride over didn't exist (I'm allergic), eaten luminous orange sweet potato mash that my nostrils and gag reflex agreed was intended for mounting tiles, and been served Sauvignon Blanc in a glass that smelled like the aforementioned cat had got to it first.

There was a break where everyone milled around, chatted in the kitchen, stretched, walked off stomach cramps, called their gastroenterologists and so on. When we reconvened, a springy young freshman girl was sitting in my seat next to Mrs Shape, asking things like: "Do you ever have to just, like, STOP and listen to his accent?"

This left me behind enemy lines for the remainder of the night, damned to the uncharted wastes of the table, open to attack on all sides. I, of course, ended up flanked by a tack-sharp retired psychologist and a maths teacher from an Ivy League college. Both were united in seeking my single-handed qualification of the entire videogames medium as valid in any way, while sharing naked contempt for same.

The psychologist was old and so asked the broader questions few are equipped to answer, at least not on short notice. Questions like: "These videogames. What possible use are they?" and then quieting for a satisfactory answer. The last time she saw anything like it was in the gaming room of a bowling alley. She found the entertainment these kids were stuck to, "what is the word?" with bony thumb and forefinger to lips, sorting through the internal thesaurus, "repulsive. Yes, that's it."

I could only blurt out some rubbish about hand-eye co-ordination and resource management before the maths man, who was round, bearded and pony-tailed – much like Comic Book Guy – weighed in with, "How does it teach resource management if all these kids are doing is killing things?" I tried to explain, god knows I did, that good games force the adoption and improvement of certain skills by increasing the challenge as you play, but how do you explain the balance of *Halo*'s weapons system to someone who openly admits they haven't revisited gaming since Colecovision?

MATHS TEACHER. BOTH WERE UNITED MEDIUM AS VALID IN ANY WAY"

Back and forth it went in this fashion all evening, like two orcas tossing a bleeding seal to each other over the surf, even if this particular seal was making valid, insightful comments borne of many years' experience with tricky first-person shooters and stealth action titles. The problem is not that I spent an evening on the back foot but that, by my small sampling of edu-muh-cated Americans, our beloved, enriching pastime is still seen as the mindless distraction of Burton's re-imagined Mike Teevee. Others around the table, generally an academic crowd, chimed in with similarly out-of-date presumptions.

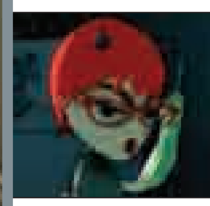
The only arrow left in my quiver was the open-ended or sandbox genre, and I sent it aloft proudly, knowing these visionary interactive experiments are only as cruel or senseless as their players. Train in magic so that you may freeze people instead of slay them; choose to tackle criminals over pedestrians; even swan around taking pictures of the sunset or flying under bridges if you feel inclined. This went down much better (it's hard to be angry at something that's only as nasty as you are) and I was able to talk them into a begrudged retreat, if only because they probably didn't know what I was yammering about. Given that this is my story, I'm calling that a win.

Many thanks



MISS ABOUT BRITAIN…

Bangers



LOVE ABOUT AMERICA…

Lucy: Daughter Of The Devil

GOT ANY QUESTIONS FOR THE SHAPE? THEN JUST DROP HIM A LINE AT: theshape@comcast.net YOU MIGHT GET A REPLY… OR POSSIBLY JUST THE FINGER

AMERIKAAN

PRODUCTS, PLACES, SERVICES AND EVENTS FROM THE LAND OF THE FREE

SNOW BLOWER

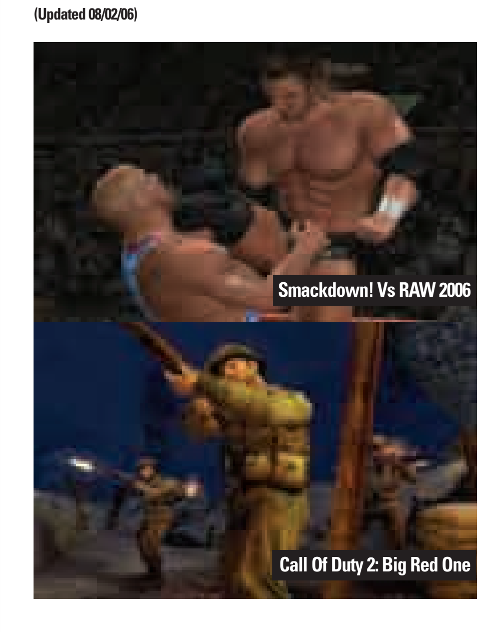


I don't know why I never saw these back in Britain, but thank Christ. The same people who shatter your serenity every eight minutes in the summer with their giant gas-powered mowers also own snow blowers, keeping their obnoxious volume output pretty even throughout the year. Louder than Zack Wylde.

US MULTIFORMAT TOP TEN

	Title	Publisher	Format
1	WWE Smackdown! Vs RAW '06	THQ	PS2
2	Call Of Duty 2: Big Red One	Activision	PS2
3	Star Wars Battlefront II	Activision	Xbox
4	Peter Jackson's King Kong	Ubisoft	PS2
5	GUN	Activision	PS2
6	True Crime: New York City	Activision	PS2
7	Madden NFL '06	EA Sports	PS2
8	Need For Speed Most Wanted	EA Sports	PS2
9	Call Of Duty 2: Big Red One	Activision	Xbox
10	Tony Hawk's American Wasteland	Activision	PS2

(Updated 08/02/06)



Smackdown! Vs RAW 2006

Call Of Duty 2: Big Red One



KONGETSU*

WITH JAPANESE CORRESPONDENT TIM ROGERS

"THEY HIRED AMERICAN FANS OF JAPANESE GAMES TO TELL A THOROUGHLY AMERICAN GAMES COMPANY HOW

So maybe you heard that the Xbox 360 didn't sell so well here in Japan. I suppose that's true. The sales figures for the first weekend show that the system sold maybe 60,000 units as opposed to the original Xbox's 120,000. I view this news with less of a 'Man, it didn't sell so well' feeling and more of a 'Man, I didn't realise the original Xbox *had* sold so well' feeling. Rumour has it that the first Xbox sold better because it had *Dead Or Alive* at launch, and that the 360 isn't selling as many because *DOA4* was delayed until just after the system's release date.

To me, Microsoft's Japanese 360 launch indicates a failure of 'by-the-numbers' marketing. It used to be any guy who went to a business seminar could go to the hotel room on the last night and whip up a killer marketing plan on his laptop after a beer and a shower. However, this coming age is one where all pre-existing methods or trends will be flipped 180.

The launch was, indeed, by the numbers, with one of every game necessary to win over the Japanese public. It had *Perfect Dark*, an amazingly localised Hollywood blockbuster of a videogame; it had *Everyparty*, a fruity Japanese party non-game of the mould that's now very popular; it even had *Ridge Racer*, and no successful modern console launches without *Ridge Racer* – just ask Sony. It was going to have *DOA4*, though in the end it didn't and the lukewarm reception is being blamed on Tecmo.

I think there's more to it than that. Microsoft had obviously studied the Japanese market extensively. I interviewed one of its American consultants for the purposes of this piece, though he provided me with no insight I didn't already possess. They hired American fans of Japanese games to tell the Japanese division of an American games company how to sell games to Japan. The conundrum here is that the American uber-game-fan-dudes are men who came to Japan because they like videogames. Not every person on earth is willing to change the course of their life, or even the language they speak, because of videogames.

There were big plans for the launch. Guards were set up outside handing out tickets, and the night before, there was an intimate party with an open bar and free food – I even got to play *Mario Kart* DS with the president of Microsoft Japan and some Sega employees. It was all planned so well. Maybe too well. After all, Sony's PSP launch saw a thousand eager punters lined up around the block, shuddering in the cold of a Shinjuku morning, but it was because of that chaos that the launch went as planned. That's not to call it 'planned chaos' however. It's a cause and effect thing. I recommend reading some Trotsky (I don't, however, recommend anyone becomes a communist).



TEACH YOURSELF JAPANESE

LESSON 41: PICKING UP AN ARTSY-TYPE GIRL

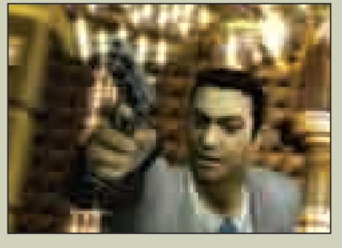
Yoku souzou shitemite kudasai. Densha ni, daremo orinai hi ga kuru to omotta toki aruka?	Imagine if you will: What if a day comes where no one gets off this train?
Ano hi ga kitara, mokuhyou ni tsuite mo, anata wa oriru ka? Donna ni jibun no koto ippiki no ookami to omotte mo, kono ore wa… zettai ni orinai to omou.	Even when you arrive at your objective, would you get off the train? Though I like to think of myself as a lone wolf – no, I definitely wouldn't get off.
Densha ga sekai kara korogatteochitemo, ore wa orinai. Nazeka toiuto, sore wa AI TO YOBU KOTO DAKARA. Anatamo, kono kibun, wakaru no kashira?	Though it may roll off the end of the earth, I would not get off that train. I'll tell you why: THAT IS WHAT WE CALL LOVE. Do you understand this feeling?

THE JAPANESE DIVISION OF TO SELL GAMES TO JAPAN”

Am I pointing the finger and calling Microsoft 'the big dumb white guy in a Japanese elevator'? No. It's just that times are changing. Japanese firms are befuddled with progress as well; the risks have been mapped out and companies are afraid of them, and now the public is bored. Ours is an age where innovations like *Katamari Damacy* are the only things setting the world on fire, though only because they come out of nowhere, after being made very carefully. And then the companies in charge clutch at them like a baby with a rattle, forcing their producers to remake that same product until the day they die. The coming of an 'age of innovation' is a myth (until the Revolution shows up). So that's what I'm saying to Microsoft. Don't give up. Don't be sad. Hang in there, and let a phenomenon come naturally. If it comes at all. You're only screwed if you think you are.

Kind regards





AN ALTERNATE VIEW FROM THE SAME GUY

There's another reason why the 360 hasn't sold like hot cakes. It was released on, perhaps, the most spectacular week for PlayStation2 games all year. Sega's yakuza action epic *Ryu Ga Gotoku* was released to enormous critical accolade on 8 December – two days before the 360 went on sale – as was the fascinating *Rogue Galaxy*. Both are hugely bold and risky games, and at the time of writing, sales figures for either title had not been published, though I'm guessing they did very well, as just about every employee in my office is currently playing *Ryu Ga Gotoku* – and we're a pretty varied sample of human beings. I guess that's what happens when you're the first to launch a new console – the developers making games for it don't really know the full potential, and developers making games for the on-the-way-out machines have just achieved mastery of their tools. Also, there was a new *Mushiking* game on DS this week – if that outsold either *Rogue Galaxy* or *Ryu Ga Gotoku*, I'll punch a subway train.

JAPANESE MULTIFORMAT TOP TEN

	Title	Publisher	Format
1	Dirge Of Cerberus: FF VII	Square-Enix	PS2
2	English Training DS	Nintendo	DS
3	Onimusha: Dawn Of Dreams	Capcom	PS2
4	Brain Training 2	Nintendo	DS
5	Animal Crossing: Wild World	Nintendo	DS
6	Brain Training	Nintendo	DS
7	Ar Tonelico	Banpresto	PS2
8	Bleach DS	Sega	DS
9	Mario Kart DS	Nintendo	DS
10	World Soccer Winning Eleven 9	Konami	PS2

(Week ending 29/01/06 © 2006 Media Create Co. Ltd. All Rights Reserved)

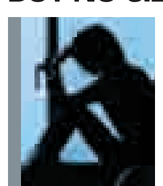


Animal Crossing: Wild World
Mario Kart DS



THE PEOPLE IN THE GAMES INDUSTRY TELL IT LIKE IT IS…

SURPRISE, SURPRISE… BUT NO CILLA



I think the element of surprise is underused when it comes to delivering memorable gaming experiences. After 20 years of gaming, I see very little I haven't seen before. *Nintendogs*, for example, may be original in execution, but I first saw the idea in 1985 when I played Activision's *Little Computer People* on my C64.

Games tend either to disappoint, to deliver what we expect, or – in rare cases – to exceed expectations. It's the games that fall into that third category that tend to become the classics.

A game that surprises the player and takes them somewhere they weren't expecting to go is a genuine rarity. Whether this manifests itself as a single flash of gameplay inspiration, clever storytelling or emotional involvement the result can be magical.

Anyone remember *GTA III's* first appearance? Now there's a title that exceeded everyone's expectations.

Clearly, a game needs that special something about it to make it memorable in the first place, but keeping tight-lipped on its content can help enormously. Developers like Rockstar, Nintendo and, to a lesser degree, Valve give almost nothing away about their games until the moment they're launched. I'd go as far as to say that this practice has become a significant part of development strategy for some companies. Gamers positively go wild when any nugget of information is released about anything that these guys do. By contrast, a company that over-saturates the media with screens, demos and previews may reveal their hand too early and lose that spark of surprise and novelty that helps the game stand out.

How many videogames in your collection are ones that truly exceeded your expectations and are they your even favourites?

Mr X loves you. And games. But mostly just you…

FROM THE FRONT

EA BUYS UP SOME MORE THINGS, MIDWAY'S AUSTRALIAN STUDIO CLOSES AND TAITO IS TAKEN OVER

EA CONDUCTS LARGEST EVER MOBILE GAMING ACQUISITION

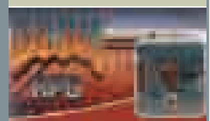
EA PHONE HOME

You just knew it would happen eventually. As mobile gaming becomes an evermore lucrative sector of the games industry, EA has acquired mobile game company Jamdat in what is both the largest ever mobile gaming acquisition and EA's biggest ever business transaction (and there've been some big ones).

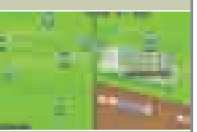
The move strengthens EA's already prominent presence in the phone games sector, which it manages to make an awful lot of money out of despite the fact that it's impossible to play a proper videogame on a device designed for talking to people and looking at naked lady screensavers. In the year following the acquisition, EA plans to develop and release 50 mobile titles, having merged its own sizeable mobile games division with Jamdat under the management of CEO Mitch Lasky. "We want to win worldwide [leadership] and we think this combined position will let us do it a lot faster than if we were to do it on our own," commented Lasky.

It has not, however, been celebrations all round for the two firms. A disgruntled Jamdat shareholder has filed a class-action lawsuit against EA in an attempt to prevent the deal going ahead, claiming that the smaller company was sold to EA at too low a price. "The proposed acquisition is the product of a hopelessly flawed process that was designed to ensure the sale of Jamdat to one buying group and one buying group only, on terms preferential to Electronic Arts," commented the shareholder. However, it seems unlikely that the deal will be rejected by the courts, as the Federal Trade Commission already found no breach of the law involved in the acquisition, effectively giving the takeover the green light. The companies appear to consider the takeover entirely amicable and, indeed, see the prospect of working together to achieve world mobile phone domination as an attractive one.

It's clear that EA sees potential for growth in the casual gaming market; the first international casuality conference is to be held this year in Amsterdam. This will likely focus on the mobile gaming sector's exceptional potential, and makes the poor N-Gage's monumental failure to tap such a market all the more amusing.



Jamdat is responsible for *Doom RPG*. It is a 'first-person turn-based action game' and, surprisingly, it's actually quite good. Honest.



EA, meanwhile, does *FIFA Mobile*. That is all.

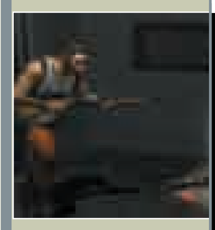
IN RECORD TIME

MIDWAY DEVELOPER SHUTS DOWN

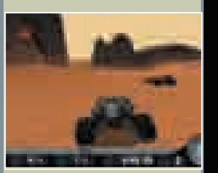


Midway has shut its Australian dev studio just four months after its acquisition in August. Midway Australia – formerly known as Ratbag and responsible for *Dukes Of Hazzard* and the *Dirt Track* titles – was working on two secret next-gen Midway products.

This closure is indicative of the publisher's keenness to reverse its fortunes over the next financial year. Diminishing popularity and dwindling profits have given shareholders cause for concern; the firm was forced to revise its forecasts for the year following a disastrous Q3 during which losses reached $29million. Midway paid over $7million for Ratbag back in August, which means that Midway Australia's closure constitutes a substantial loss for the publisher.



Midway's latest titles, including *The Suffering: Ties That Bind*, have failed to perform as well as expected.



The closure of Ratbag is a shame, but it's just another small developer to add to the pile of decaying corpses.

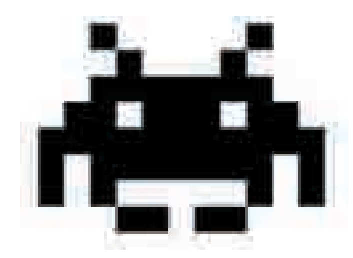


TAITO FOREVER

TAITO RETAINS ITS IDENTITY FOLLOWING A LONG-EXPECTED TAKEOVER

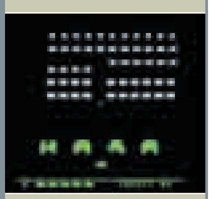
Square Enix has announced that it is to complete a takeover deal with Taito following its purchase of a 93.7% stake in the company last year. By 7 March Taito will no longer be listed as an independent company on the Tokyo Stock Exchange. Happily Taito will keep its name and its heritage as a wholly owned subsidiary of Square Enix rather than being incorporated into the larger company.

We know names don't really mean anything, as indicated by Infogrames' recent flagrant abuse of the Atari brand. Although the Taito name carries *Space Invaders* and *Bubble Bobble* with it, today the firm makes most of its money from pachinko machines, karaoke units and arcade cabinets as opposed to the software that made it legendary back at the birth and preliminary stages of modern gaming. Its arcade collections still sell well; last year it made ¥84.6billion ($753.1million) and its strong performance looks set to continue over the next financial year.





Taito's glory days may have been at gaming's genesis, but the company is still a worthwhile acquisition.



Thanks to Square-Enix retaining the Taito name, the company's heritage will stay alive for years to come.

UK MULTIFORMAT TOP TEN

	Title	Publisher	Format
1	Dead Or Alive 4	Microsoft	360
2	Need For Speed: Most Wanted	EA Games	Multi
3	Peter Jackson's King Kong	Ubisoft	Multi
4	The Sims 2	EA Games	Multi
5	Pro Evolution Soccer 5	Konami	Multi
6	FIFA 2006	Activision	Multi
7	Call Of Duty 2	Activision	Multi
8	GTA: Liberty City Stories	Rockstar	PSP
9	Project Gotham Racing 3	Microsoft	360
10	Star Wars Battlefront II	LucasArts	Multi

EA's 'pimping' spree has come to an end and *Dead Or Alive 4* has toppled *Most Wanted*. This proves what we've always believed: a few pretty ladies and a mildly enhanced counter system is more important to your average gamer than racing mediocrity. Jackpot.

All information is compiled by ChartTrack and is the strict copyright of Elspa (UK) Ltd. UK Entertainment Software Sales Charts (Full Price, All Formats) (w/e 28 January 2006)

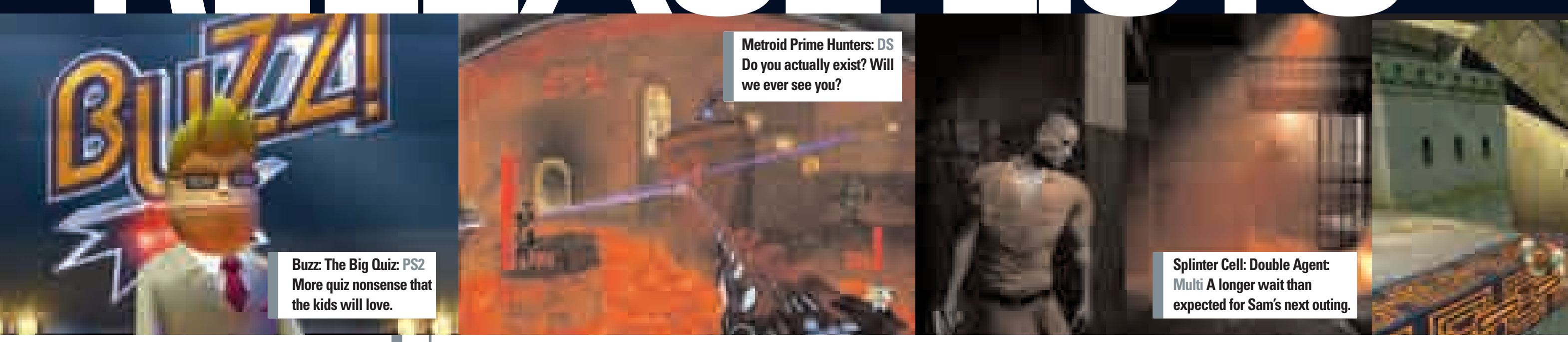


Dead Or Alive 4

Need For Speed: Most Wanted

Pro Evolution Soccer 5

RELEASE LISTS



Buzz: The Big Quiz: PS2 More quiz nonsense that the kids will love.

Metroid Prime Hunters: DS Do you actually exist? Will we ever see you?

Splinter Cell: Double Agent: Multi A longer wait than expected for Sam's next outing.



games™ MOST PLAYED

PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 5

Format: Xbox/Xbox 360
Publisher: Konami

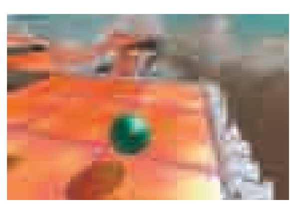
The enhanced visual clarity of the 360 has seen *PES5* jammed back in the disc tray. Online is the way to go, and if you're unlucky enough to come up against us, you will lose. The 360's pad is far more suited to *PES* than the original Xbox controller, and it shows in our unparalleled expansive play.



MARBLE BLAST ULTRA

Format: Xbox 360
Publisher: Garage Games Inc

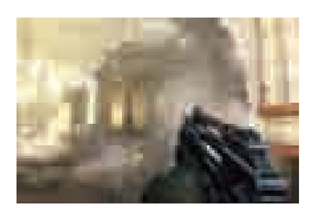
This little gem has sapped up more of our time than any full-priced 360 game this month. For the sum of six pounds from the Live Arcade service, this mix of marble madness and monkey ball is fiendishly difficult and incredibly addictive. The multiplayer, in particular, is superb.



BLACK

Format: PlayStation2
Publisher: Electronic Arts

We had high hopes, and as is fast becoming the norm, Criterion did not let us down. Loud, fast, tense and with more explosions than a thousand *Die Hards*, *Black* is everything you'd expect from a next-generation shooter, only it's NOT next-gen. Puts the likes of *Perfect Dark Zero* to shame.



PLAYSTATION2

Month	Title	Publisher	
MARCH '06			
10 March	Fight Night Round 3	Electronic Arts	Wanted
10 March	24:The Game	Sony	
10 March	Namco Museum 50th Anniversary	Namco	
10 March	NBA 2K6	2K Games	
10 March	NHL 2K6	2K Games	
17 March	Buzz! The Big Quiz	Sony	
17 March	Driver: Parallel Lines	Atari	
17 March	Commandos Strike Force	SCi	
17 March	Onimusha: Dawn Of Dreams	Capcom	Wanted
24 March	The Godfather	Electronic Arts	
24 March	Full Spectrum Warrior: Ten Hammers	THQ	
31 March	Sonic Riders	Sega	
31 March	Ghost Recon 3: Advanced Warfighter	Ubisoft	Wanted
TBC	Metal Gear Solid 3: Subsistence	Konami	
TBC	Bully	Rockstar	
APRIL '06			
07 April	Guitar Hero	Red Octane	
TBC	Lara Croft Tomb Raider: Legend	Eidos	
Q2 '06			
TBC	America's Army: Rise Of A Soldier	Ubisoft	
TBC	Fear And Respect	Midway	
TBC	Castlevania: Curse Of Darkness	Konami	
TBC	Combat Elite: WWII Paratroopers	Koch Media	
TBC	Atelier Iris: Eternal Mana	Koei	Wanted
TBC 2006			
TBC	Final Fantasy XII	Sony	
TBC	Okami	Capcom	Wanted
TBC	Pro Evolution Soccer Management	Konami	
TBC	Kingdom Hearts II	Sony	
TBC	Final Fight Streetwise	Capcom	
TBC	Phantasy Star Universe	Sega	Wanted
TBC	Hitman: Blood Money	Eidos	
TBC	25To Life	Eidos	
TBC	Scarface	vivendi	
TBC	Super Monkey Ball Adventure	Sega	
TBC	Pro Evolution Soccer 6	Konami	Wanted
TBC	Saint Seiya: Sanctuary	Atari	
TBC	The Da Vinci Code	Sony	

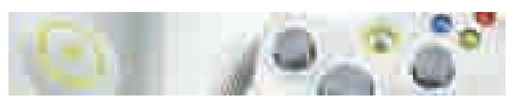


GAMECUBE

Month	Title	Publisher
MARCH '06		
17 March	Sonic Riders	Sega
31 March	Odama	Nintendo
31 March	Pac-Man World	Electronic Arts
TBC	Harvest Moon: Magical Melody	Rising Star
Q1 '06		
TBC	The Legend Of Zelda: Twilight Princess	Nintendo
TBC 2006		
TBC	Chaos Field	TBC

XBOX

Month	Title	Publisher	
10 March	Painkiller: Hell Wars	DreamCatcher	
10 March	Fight Night Round 3	Electronic Arts	Wanted
10 March	NBA 2K6	2K Games	
10 March	NHL 2K6	2K Games	
17 March	Driver: Parallel Lines	Atari	
17 March	Commandos Strike Force	SCi	
24 March	Final Fight Streetwise	Capcom	
24 March	The Godfather	Electronic Arts	Wanted
31 March	Full Spectrum Warrior: Ten Hammers	THQ	Wanted
31 March	Ghost Recon 3: Advanced Warfighter	Ubisoft	
31 March	Sonic Riders	Sega	
Q1 '06			
TBC	America's Army: Rise Of A Soldier	Ubisoft	
TBC	American McGee Presents: Bad Day LA	Enlight	
TBC	Fear And Respect	Midway	
TBC	Castlevania: Curse Of Darkness	Konami	
TBC	Bully	Rockstar	
TBC	Combat Elite: WWII Paratroopers	Koch Media	
TBC	Scarface	Vivendi	
APRIL '06			
TBC	Lara Croft Tomb Raider: Legend	Eidos	
TBC 2006			
TBC	Sensible Soccer	Kuju	
TBC	Starcraft: Ghost	Blizzard	
TBC	Splinter Cell: Double Agent	Ubisoft	
TBC	Scarface	Vivendi	
TBC	Super Monkey Ball Adventure	Vivendi	
BC	Pro Evolution Soccer 6	Konami	
TBC	Vultures	CDV	



XBOX 360

Month	Title	Publisher	
MARCH '06			
3 March	Fight Night Round 3	Electronic Arts	Wanted
10 March	NBA 2K6	2K	
17 March	The Outfit	THQ	
24 March	Battlefield 2	Electronic Arts	Wanted
31 March	Moto GP 06	THQ	
31 March	Ghost Recon 3: Advanced…	Ubisoft	Wanted

CALM YOUR FEVERISH ANTICIPATION WITH OUR COMPREHENSIVE LIST OF FORTHCOMING RELEASES



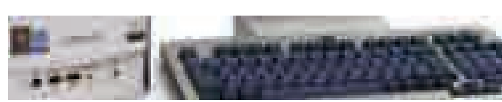
Tokobot: PSP
A truly original portable title to call our own.

Phantasy Star Universe: Multi
An apology for *Shadow The Hedgehog*. Of sorts.

Stubbs The Zombie In 'Rebel Without A Pulse': Xbox
It's great when you're dead, yeah.

Final Fight Streetwise: Multi
File under 'Didn't Really Need To Happen'.

[Month]	[Title]	[Publisher]	[Wanted]
APRIL '06			
07 April	Top Spin 2	2K Games	
TBC	Elder Scrolls: Oblivion	2K Games	Wanted
Q1 '06			
TBC	CHROMEHOUNDS	Sega	
TBC	Lara Croft Tomb Raider: Legend	Eidos	
TBC	TimeShift	Atari	Wanted
TBC 2006			
TBC	Dead Rising	Capcom	
TBC	Test Drive Unlimited	Atari	
TBC	Final Fantasy XI	Sega	
TBC	Sonic The Hedgehog	Sega	
TBC	Too Human	Microsoft	
TBC	Gears Of War	Microsoft	Wanted
TBC	Prey	2K Games	
TBC	Lost Planet: Extreme Condition	Capcom	Wanted
TBC	Blue Dragon	Microsoft	
TBC	Splinter Cell: Double Agent	Ubisoft	Wanted
TBC	Scarface	Vivendi	
TBC	Dead or Alive: Chronos	Microsoft	
TBC	Dead or Alive Xtreme Beach Volleyball	Microsoft	
TBC	Frame City Killer	Namco	
TBC	Pro Evolution Soccer 6	Konami	Wanted



PC

Month	Title	Publisher	
MARCH '06			
3 March	FIFA Street 2	Electronic Arts	
17 March	War On Terror	Monte Cristo	
17 March	Commandos: Strike Force	Eidos	
24 March	The Godfather	Electronic Arts	
24 March	Faces Of War	Ubisoft	
24 March	TimeShift	Atari	Wanted
31 March	Ghost Recon 3: Advanced…	Ubisoft	Wanted
31 March	Full Spectrum Warrior: Ten…	THQ	
31 March	Heroes of Might and Magic 5	Ubisoft	
APRIL '06			
13 April	Auto Assault	NCSoft	Wanted
28 April	Hitman: Blood Money	Eidos	
28 April	Lara Croft Tomb Raider: Legend	Eidos	
Q1 '06			
TBC	Heroes Of Might And Magic V	Ubisoft	
TBC	Company Of Heroes	THQ	
TBC	American McGee Presents: Bad Day LA	Enlight	
TBC 2006			
TBC	Titan Quest	THQ	Wanted
TBC	Unreal Tournament 2007	Midway	
TBC	Heart of Empire: Rome	Deep Silver	

GAME BOY ADVANCE

Month	Title	Publisher
MARCH '06		
31 March	Tales Of Phantasia	Namco
APRIL '06		
07 April	Top Spin Tennis 2	2K Games
TBC 2006		
TBC	Final Fantasy IV	Nintendo
TBC	Wario Ware Twisted!	Nintendo
TBC	Yu-Gi-Oh World Championship 06	Konami

PLAYSTATION PORTABLE

Month	Title	Publisher	
MARCH '06			
24 March	Final Fight: Streetwise	Capcom	
24 March	Mega Man: Powered Up	Capcom	
31 March	Brothers In Arms	Ubisoft	
31 March	OutRun 2006: Coast 2 Coast	Sega	
TBC	Tokobot	2K Games	
Q1 '06			
TBC	The Godfather	Electronic Arts	
TBC	NBA Ballers	Midway	
TBC	Splinter Cell Essentials	Ubisoft	
TBC 2006			
TBC	Monster Hunter Freedom	Capcom	Wanted
TBC	Viewtiful Joe: Red Hot Rumble	Capcom	
TBC	Gran Turismo 4 Mobile	Sony	
TBC	Me & My Katamari	Electronic Arts	Wanted
TBC	Daxter	Sony	
TBC	Talkman	Sony	
TBC	Exit	Ubisoft	Wanted
TBC	Socom Brave Team	Sony	
TBC	The Con	Sony	

NINTENDO DS

Month	Title	Publisher	
MARCH '06			
10 March	Phoenix Wright: Ace Attorney	Capcom	
17 March	Worms Open Warfare	THQ	
31 March	Animal Crossing: Wild World	Nintendo	
31 March	Resident Evil: Deadly Silence	Capcom	Wanted
APRIL '06			
07 April	Trauma Center: Under The Knife	Nintendo	
14 April	Electroplankton	Nintendo	
Q1 '06			
TBC	New Super Mario Bros.	Nintendo	
TBC	Harvest Moon	Rising Star	
TBC	Super Monkey Ball Touch & Roll	Sega	
TBC	Boktai 2	Konami	
TBC	Megaman Battle Network 5	Capcom	
TBC 2006			
TBC	Metroid Prime: Hunters	Nintendo	
TBC	Pokémon Diamond/Pearl	Nintendo	
TBC	Viewtiful Joe: Double Trouble	Capcom	Wanted

PLEASE NOTE: While every effort has been made to ensure these dates are correct at the time of going to press, they are liable to change at short notice. Which is completely beyond our control, so don't go giving us evils.



ON THE HORIZON

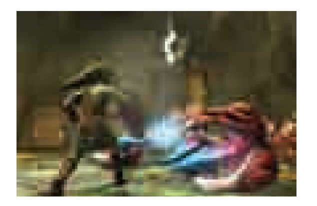
LOST PLANET: EXTREME CONDITION

Format: Xbox 360
Publisher: Capcom
It's no secret that **games™** is a big fan of Capcom, and this gorgeous mech-based adventure looks set to satiate our needs. The visuals are everything one would expect of a second-gen 360 title, and if the mix of *Starship Troopers* and *Lone Wolf* plays as well as it looks, we're in for a treat.



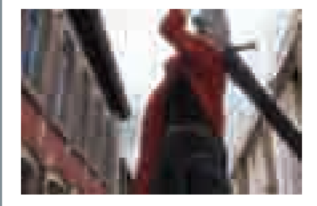
THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: TWILIGHT PRINCESS

Format: GameCube
Publisher: Nintendo
The continual slippage of this game's release doesn't help the GameCube's last few moments of life, but we'd rather have it late and perfect than compromised in any way. If it's anything short of spectacular, we'll be very, very surprised.



DEVIL MAY CRY 4

Format: PlayStation3
Publisher: Capcom
Yet more Capcom love on the horizon, with what is, perhaps, our most anticipated PlayStation3 title. In all honesty, *Devil May Cry 3* with prettier graphics would suffice, but we're sure Capcom isn't going to settle for just a rehash of the same old engine. Should be something very special indeed.





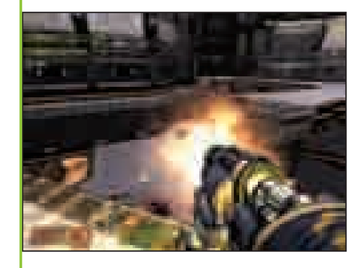
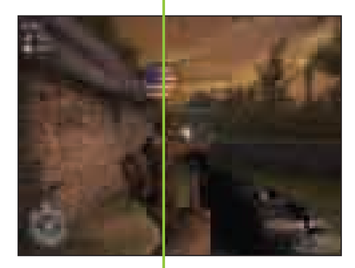
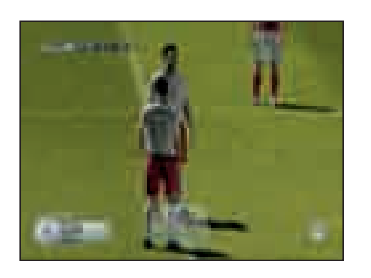
ONLINE, ALL THE TIME – THAT'S THE XBOX 360 WAY. BUT THEN, ARE THE GAMES YOU CAN PLAY WORTH THE

TRIED & TESTED

OUT OF THE LOOP

WE GOT ONE… DID YOU? IF YOU DID, THEN YOU'LL BE WANTING TO MAKE USE OF THOSE WONDERFUL ONLINE ABILITIES THAT THE XBOX 360 HAS – WITH VIRTUALLY EVERY GAME HAVING SOME KIND OF ONLINE COMPONENT, IT WOULD BE SILLY NOT TO SPEND SOME TIME PLAYING AGAINST YOUR FRIENDS…

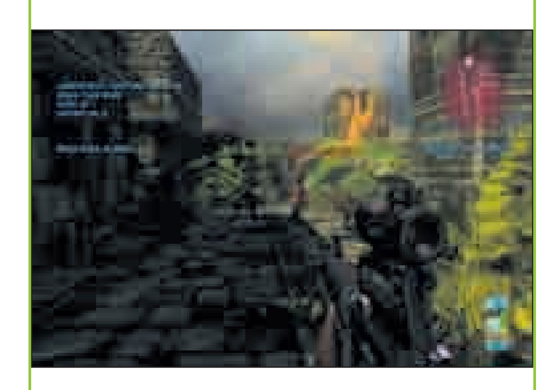
With just some 70,000 lucky UK gamers able to get their hands on an Xbox 360 so far, it's no real shock that a lot of us have spent the last couple of months pining after new hardware. If you are among the privileged few, then the chances are you've already got your hands on a couple of games and probably even tried your hand at a little online gaming as well. If you're not sure of the games worth playing, don't panic. We've been tearing up the big games, in a bid to find out which ones are worth your hard-earned pounds and which should be used as £50 coasters. So if you already have a machine, you'd do well to read on. If not, well… may as well see just what you're missing out on, eh?


EFFORT? WE'VE SPENT PLENTY OF TIME WITH EACH OF THEM SO YOU DON'T HAVE TO WASTE THAT CASH…

PERFECT DARK ZERO

WELL… IT **CAN'T BE WORSE** THAN THE SINGLE-PLAYER, RIGHT?



With its dodgy AI and lack of consistency, few could claim that *Perfect Dark*'s single-player experience is anything other than fair. But as the early reviews correctly pointed out amid gushing praise for an average game, the game's multiplayer component is easily its strongest feature.

Levels are varied, expansive and well designed for large-scale conflict. Elements such as using cover and evasive rolling work far better than they really should – the slightly broken cover implementation makes it quite impractical and tricky to abuse. Customisation options mean you can play for months without seeing every combination of levels, options and weapons, and the huge array of firearms means that players will pick weapons to suit their strategies. Shotguns for the close-range enthusiast, rockets and grenades for demolition nuts, and pistols for those wishing to show off their 1337 skills.

With support for up to 32 players plus bots, there's potential for massive 50-man rumbles and this combined with the other positives means that Dark's second coming isn't quite the limp return it first seemed.

7/10

JO REDEEMS HER LACKLUSTRE SOLO PERFORMANCE

PROJECT GOTHAM RACING 3

BIZARRE CREATION OR **GOD'S GIFT** TO GAMING?



After redefining what Xbox Live could add to a gaming experience with *PGR2*, it's only right that Bizarre Creations should lead the way in 360 online gaming too. As if the high-speed action wasn't good enough offline, new modes like Capture The Track add to the potential of network gaming on top of the expectedly wonderful straight races.

However, the world isn't taking to Gotham TV as fondly as Bizarre hoped. With a game this intensely enjoyable, players are more likely to want to get on the track and stay there than watch other racers have fun. Once the real big guns get on and competition heats up, this feature will undoubtedly garner more interest – watching slightly better players is light years away from seeing how the best of the best cane the Nürburgring in breathtaking sub-six-minute times.

Regardless, the implementation and sheer playability of *PGR3* make it hands-down the jewel in the crown of Live play on the 360 and we never want to be without it. Watch out, though – there are a lot of players out there who know every corner of every course.

9/10

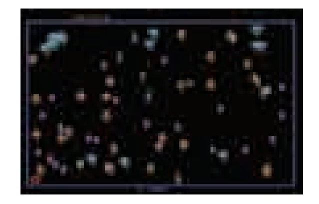
TYPICALLY STUNNING STUFF FROM BIZARRE

retro revival

Good old-fashioned gameplay – it's not all forgotten gems of yesteryear…

ROBOTRON 2084

Robotron adheres to a very simple rule-set once you get your head around saving humans and killing those horrible circular things before they start spewing out horrible amounts of death. The highlight of the Live Arcade service so far.



GEOMETRY WARS: RETRO EVOLVED

With the demo version tucked away in the corner of *PGR3*, this will be one of the more popular purchases. Intense, beautiful, hypnotic and addictive, get online and download the full version now. No, *right* now.



GAUNTLET

There's a love/hate division when it comes to Midway's four-player adventure, but when you play co-op over Xbox Live, it's great fun with a full quota of players. Hacking, slashing and throwing for hours doesn't get nearly as dull as it should.



OUT OF THE LOOP

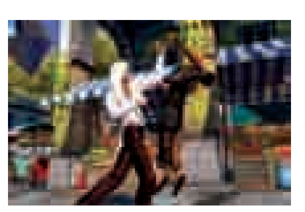
ONLINE, ALL THE TIME – THAT'S THE XBOX 360 WAY. BUT THEN, ARE THE GAMES YOU CAN PLAY WORTH THE

on the horizon

So, what are the big online games to look forward to in 2006?

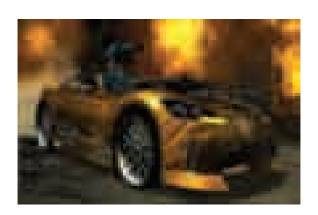
DEAD OR ALIVE 4

Online brawling still hasn't taken off to the extent of FPS or racing games, but Tecmo will be hoping to turn that around with the most beautiful beat-'em-up ever. Early impressions could be more favourable, but we're still willing to give this a chance.



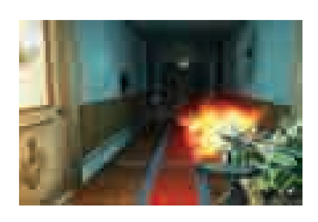
FULL AUTO

A bizarre mix of *Burnout, Twisted Metal* and vehicular manslaughter, Sega's explosion-filled driving game is a firm favourite for the coming year. And with online support for up to six players, we'll be able to blow people up from half a world away too.



TIMESHIFT

First-person action might be everywhere you look on the 360 scene, but Atari's upcoming shooter looks to bring enough interesting new ideas to not only justify its existence but to get us quite excited as well. Definitely one to watch.



QUAKE 4

RAVEN MANAGES TO TEACH AN OLD STROGG **NEW TRICKS**

The shaky frame rate damages things a little, but not as much as you'd expect.



Of all the 360 launch titles, we have to say that *Quake 4* was among the most disappointing. Not because it's a bad game, but more due to the fact that it was clearly just a rushed PC port that hadn't been optimised for the new hardware. And things don't look too good when you actually get online with it, either – the interface and implementation of setting up a Live game leave a lot to be desired. No developer seems to have looked at Bungie's exceptional set-up for *Halo 2*, instead going back to the way things were when the Live service was in its infancy. Games can take forever to set up, but when the action finally kicks in, you can breathe a sigh of relief. It's worth the wait all right.

This is clearly a return to multiplayer form for the guys responsible for the revoltingly enjoyable *Quake 3 Arena*. Level design is close to perfect, weapons seem well-balanced, and the fast-paced action takes us back to those months of our life that were poured into *Arena*. To say this is just as good an experience is probably fair but, as with the main game, optimisation (or the lack thereof) will definitely be grounds for complaint. Frame rate isn't exactly stable – a crime for an online console FPS, especially one as quick and reaction-based as this – but assuming you don't get stung by this too often, you'll find *Quake 4* to be a classic slice of old-school multiplayer carnage.

7/10

TECHNICAL HITCHES ASIDE, A GREAT EXPERIENCE

CALL OF DUTY 2

THE FIRST **CASUALTY OF WAR** IS SCALE, APPARENTLY

Why did you cut it all down, Activision? Why? It's a crying shame, to be sure.

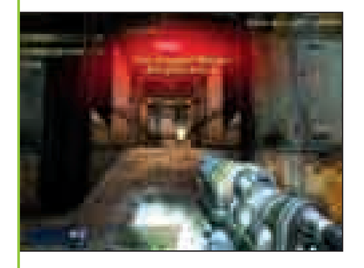


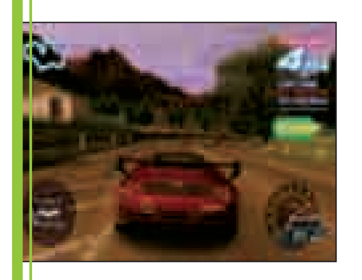
Oh, how we wanted this to be brilliant. Having been party to full-scale wars on the PC version of the game, we would have assumed that a console on a par with PC hardware could muster similar battles. We were mistaken. With the player limit capped at a mere eight, a lot of the maps lose their impact – the snowy wastes of Russia just aren't the same without potential headshot victims scurrying around the debris unsuspectingly. This really goes against the ethos of the main game, and while smaller maps and well co-ordinated games still go down without a hitch, it's just a real shame that a game otherwise superior to the PC version should fall down in what is such a crucial area.

Connection issues also manage to creep in, but these may just be teething problems. We'd certainly like to see more freedom within game creation – indeed, fans on the Infinity Ward forums have put together a petition for a patch – but despite its faults, *Call Of Duty 2* is still great fun when you get a good game going. Weapons work well, maps are beautifully put together and game modes are imaginative and, more importantly, enjoyable.

6/10

NOT A PATCH ON THE EPIC PC BATTLES



EFFORT? WE'VE SPENT PLENTY OF TIME WITH EACH OF THEM SO YOU DON'T HAVE TO WASTE THAT CASH…

FIFA '06

QUITE POSSIBLY THE **SHINIEST FOOTBALL** GAME EVER

It's like watching wax models play football… badly. Not what the 360 needs.



With every launch comes at least a couple of bad titles and despite a really strong of run of late (yes, we have wiped *Marvel Nemesis* from our memories and would suggest that you do the same), it's EA's turn to drop the ball. *FIFA* for the 360 is a bit of a mess, to be perfectly honest. Still playing catch-up to Konami's sublime *Pro Evolution Soccer* series, this next-gen debut attempts to set itself apart by cutting the number of teams dramatically (not a cheap way to get around everything being more time-consuming to develop though – this is the *Road To The World Cup* edition, silly) and making the matches look like an after-hours kickabout in Madame Tussauds. Good start, guys.

Throw into the mix that the gameplay is still several years off the pace – ball physics are odd to say the least and matches lack any real thrill – and you've got quite a poor football game, even when played against an equally bored opponent. Another victim of poor online implementation, it's as though EA doesn't even want you to play *FIFA* online. Hardly surprising really – if you realise that your £50 game was vastly inferior to the Xbox version in every aspect that doesn't involve grease, varnish or melting wax, you wouldn't be a very happy customer. Might as well have 'don't bother' in the Live features list on the back of the box.

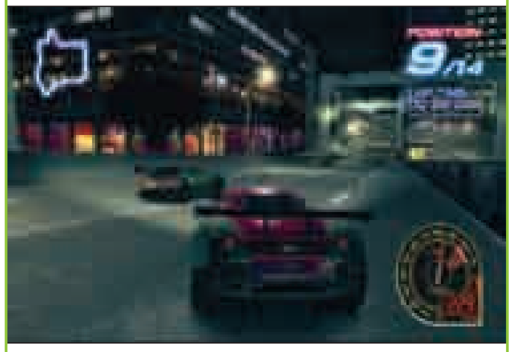
4/10

A POOR GAME WITH POOR IMPLEMENTATION

RIDGE RACER 6

SLIP-SLIDING AWAY – ARCADE RACING FINALLY COMES HOME

It's as simple as they come, but Namco has brought the fun back to the series.



If you've reached the latter stages of *Ridge Racer 6*, you'll be familiar with the dirty tricks AI racers get up to. Duel races, especially, are made ridiculously frustrating by opponents with seemingly bottomless nitrous tanks and while the game itself is fantastic fun, this kind of silliness is enough to drive you to tossing the disc out of the window.

Imagine, then, a world where your rivals don't play by their own rules. A world where all racers are equal. A world where your opponents can be from the four corners of the globe (or at least they could if it were square). That world is Xbox Live and this is exactly where *RR6* comes into its own.

The core racing experience is wonderfully solid, making *RR6* online a joy. Great courses and good competition make up for the lack of pace and with plenty of achievements to unlock by simply playing opponents over Live, there's no reason not to kick back for a few hours and unleash powersliding punishment upon the world. Online play, here, is a decidedly old-school affair – *Gotham* is the place to go for the more option-hungry gamer, while Namco serves up a glorious slice of arcade racing at its finest.

8/10

NO CHEATING AI = HAPPY GAMERS

market leaders

Xbox Live Marketplace – what exactly is it there for?

CONTENT CRAZY

Live Marketplace will build on the concept of premium content by offering extra cars, weapons, levels, items and teams for download. Rather than cash up front, you'll be charged in points, making it seem that much softer on your wallet.



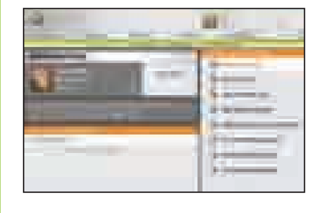
WIRED FOR SOUND

Ridge Racer 6 takes the idea of premium content further. Offering extra tunes for the soundtrack via Marketplace makes us question, how far will this go? The potential is huge but it's up to Microsoft to capitalise on it without abusing it.



PICTURE PERFECT

Marketplace can be used to pick up personalisation items like profile pictures or console themes relating to a game. The fact they're available to all means that they're far from personal, but if you're into a game, they're a great way to show it off.





Intricate character design at its very finest **Cool Spot, Mega Drive [Virgin] 1994**





SEGA TRIES TO PHULFIL ALL OUR PHANTASIES

PHANTASY STAR UNIVERSE

DETAILS

FORMAT: PlayStation2, PC
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Sega
DEVELOPER: Sonic Team
RELEASE: May (Japan: Jan '06, US: May '06)
GENRE: RPG
PLAYERS: Massively Multiplayer Online

CONCEPT

Sonic Team's long awaited follow up to the wonderful *Phantasy Star Online* focuses as much of its energy on providing a rich single-player experience to accompany the online *Universe*.

HISTORY

The *Phantasy Star* saga has a strong heritage, dating all the way back to the days of the Master System.

PS2 **The Dreamcast left us with many fond memories.** It only takes a brief trawl of the internet's more popular videogames forums to encounter a thread waxing lyrical about the machine, its games or its unfortunate demise. Many less devoted gamers may forget exactly what the Dreamcast brought to the table; it was console gaming's first foray into 128-bit, it gave us countless 'arcade quality' conversions and, crucially, it was the first console to take tentative steps into the minefield that is online gaming. By quite some distance, in fact.

Of course, the game that really lit Sega's online torch was the extremely popular MMORPG *Phantasy Star Online* from the illustrious Sonic Team. Recently re-released with its second episode on Xbox (perhaps a better breeding ground for a thriving online community, given the relative stability of the Live service), it has proven extremely popular with both genre fans and those normally put off by the sight of spiky haired hero-boys. The ideas of community and teamwork are intrinsic to the MMO experience, and *Phantasy Star Online* introduced a wealth of console gamers to this most unique of videogame types through its manipulation of the genre.

One area where *PSO* was left wanting, though, was its slightly lacklustre Single-player mode. Essentially a stripped-down version of the full online game with the human element removed, it only really appealed to the hardcore faithful. Given the difficulty many Dreamcast gamers had in actually getting their machines online, this impacted on the game's commercial success. Fully aware of this, Sonic Team has approached its forthcoming *Phantasy Star Universe* with a different attitude, and is focused on providing a rich single-player experience. "Firstly, we want people to understand that we don't focus on one mode more than another," says Takao Miyoshi, *PSU*'s producer, explaining Sonic Team's motives for this decision. "However, we thought that by enriching the Single-player mode, *PSU* would appeal to even more people. We pleased many players through the network game in *PSO*, but we felt fans from the old



Relax, take the weight off your feet and have a chat – albeit one that you have to type in on a pad.

Phantasy Star series might feel there was not enough of a single-player game in *PSO*. And so we decided *PSU* should merge experiences from single-player and network multiplayer to the highest level."

It's a declaration of intent that is reflected in Sega's decision to release the game on PS2 and PC only, leaving the perhaps more obvious Xbox Live avenue out in the cold. When quizzed on this choice, Satoshi Sakai, the game's director, remained tight-lipped, simply stating, "We thought PS2 and PC would be the most appropriate platform for the type of game we have been developing." It's a fairly abrupt answer, but reading between the lines, it's clear that Sega wants access to the largest installed user-base, and it's creating a game specifically for that market. "We at Sonic Team are always aiming to meet the global market. We're trying to make games appealing to a global audience as well as those who enjoy the Japanese-style games. We want *PSU* to be accepted by people outside Japan as well," he says.

However, Sonic Team is fully aware that it mustn't alienate the *Phantasy Star* fanbase if *PSU* is to be successful. Certainly, the story is pure *Phantasy Star*, as Sakai explains. "The Gurhal system, which has three planets, is the gameworld of *Phantasy Star Universe*," he says, "the four types of species that live in the system are now co-existing with each other after a war that has raged for 500 years. 100 years after the establishment of the Tripartite Ally, the Gurhal system is suddenly invaded by an unknown living matter called Seed. Their world begins to get cloaked in darkness…" It certainly sounds like classic RPG fare, and exactly what fans of the series – and the genre as a whole – are likely to lap up. "In single-player, players control Ethan Waber," adds Miyoshi. "He witnesses the Seed invasion and becomes a member of the private security company Guardians. Ethan grows from being an average boy living in the Guardians colony to a hero that saves the world from ruin. Through many trials, and encountering many people, Ethan gradually finds out what it is that he is fighting for."

And he'll certainly be fighting. *PSU* continues the series' ethos of real-time combat, and has significantly advanced *PSO*'s fighting engine to include a range of moves, styles and weaponry. "The combat system incorporates a three-hit

RACE RELATIONS

There are five primary lifeforms that populate the Graal system. These are the humans, the Newmans (no, sadly not Gary), the Beasts, the Cast (which is the obligatory robot race), and finally the malevolent Seed. Each tribe comes set with its own strengths and weaknesses, and any ambitious player who wants to come out on top in both the offline and online arenas of the *Phantasy Star Universe* game will have to get themselves acquainted with all of the subtleties and nuances of each class. Although Ethan – the main controllable character – is a human, in the online game players are able to choose their preferred race, which will determine their weapon selection and special powers. It's also advisable for teams to be made up of a mixture of races, in order to deal effectively with any situation that presents itself.

PHANTASY STAR UNIVERSE

PLAYSTATION2/MULTIFORMAT

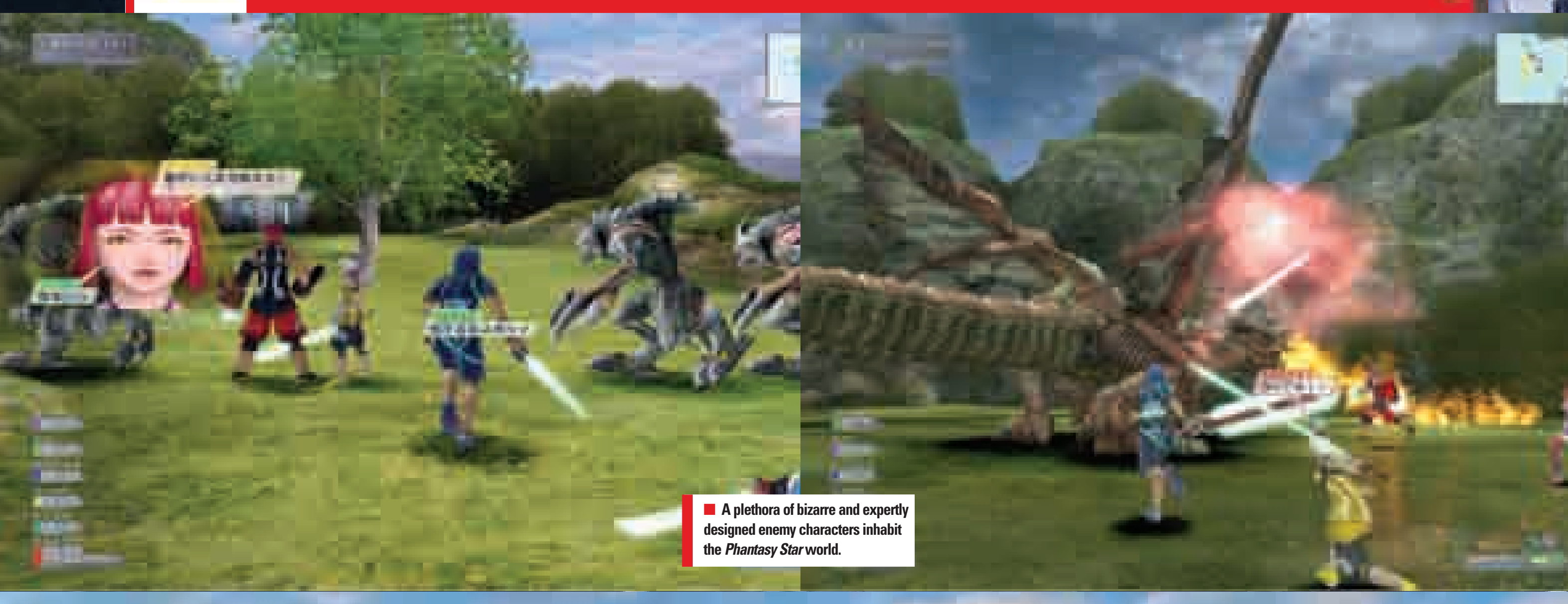


DEVELOPER PROFILE

■ One of the most revered and respected development houses around, Sonic Team is responsible for a series of hits throughout the Nineties, and on into this millennium. With Captain Yuji Naka at the studio's helm, it remains one of Sega's only standalone internal elements, having survived the company-wide merger last year.

HISTORY

- **SONIC RUSH** 2005 [Nintendo DS]
- **PHANTASY STAR ONLINE** 2001 [Dreamcast]
- **SAMBA DE AMIGO** 2000 [Dreamcast]



■ A plethora of bizarre and expertly designed enemy characters inhabit the *Phantasy Star* world.

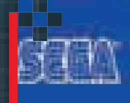
"THE COMBO-DRIVEN ACTION GAMEPLAY PROVIDES AN ENGAGING EXPERIENCE"

SEGA PRESS RELEASE

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

LET ME BE YOUR PHANTASY

PHANTASY STAR ONLINE + FINAL FANTASY VII – DREAMCAST = PHANTASY STAR UNIVERSE



PUBLISHER PROFILE

■ The once proud hardware creator is now merely a third-party publishing house, but that hasn't stopped Sega being one of the biggest names in videogames distribution. A consolidation of its internal studios and a merger with Sammy has left the company in a far stronger position, meaning it'll be around for many years to come.

HISTORY

- **SUPER MONKEY BALL** 2001 [GameCube]
- **VIRTUA FIGHTER 2** 1995 [Saturn]
- **SONIC THE HEDGEHOG** 1990 [Mega Drive]



■ Despite appearing on the PS2, Sonic Team has worked hard to make the game look highly polished.

HAVE WE MET BEFORE?

The first port of call for any potential online traveller is *Phantasy Star Universe*'s character creation mode. As well as gender and race, players can completely customise their look so that they stand out in the bustling cities of the Graal system. For every player you create, you will be given your very own 'Player's Room', where you can take friends back to discuss 'tactics' (read: unpleasant teenage cybersex). Then it's off to the online battlefield, in a team of up to six players. The online story promises to be completely different to its offline equivalent, meaning that the game should offer something for everyone… and not surprisingly, there's likely to be plenty of replay value in there as well. Naturally, then, we're looking forward to traversing the Graal system in search of the most amusing characters, so that we can create a merry band of freaks. If you see three adventurers with massive hats and green boots, it's probably us.

combo for normal melee attacks," says Sakai, "however, it can be extended to a maximum six-hit combo using 'Photon Arts' as weapons. There are three types of Photon Art: Skill for melee, Bullet for shooting and Technique for magic. Players can choose and select them according to situations and battle style, and the Photon Arts will improve with continuous use. In addition to this, there's a first-person view available with the shooting weapon that enables players to aim at monsters in the distance."

This, coupled with the ability to duel-wield a firearm and sword, means that combat in *Phantasy Star Universe* will offer much more than the standard RPG hack and slash affair. "In *PSU*, there are over 20 categories of weapons that are separated into three types: Melee types such as sabres and swords, Gun types like handguns, rifles and shotguns and Magic Casting types such as rods," Miyoshi explains. "In addition to this, there are weapon vendors who own their unique weapons in each."

"All weapons that can be used by the player are put into the Weapon Pallet," interjects Sakai, describing the more complicated aspects of the game's weapon system. "They are then categorised into one-handed weapons and double-handed weapons. One-handed weapons can be put into the pallet and combined with another one-handed weapon. So, players will be required to select the appropriate weapons from the pallet according to the type of enemy; it's all about weakness and numbers." Naturally, Sonic Team is looking for the perfect balance between tactics and real-time combat, and with *PSU*, it might have hit the nail on the head. "In addition to this," he adds, "all weapons have special attacks: the aforementioned Photon Arts which are available with user customisation. This will be available in both single-player and network Multiplayer mode. Therefore, players will rarely meet another gamer who has the same weapons and pallets."

"SONIC TEAM IS LOOKING FOR THE PERFECT BALANCE BETWEEN TACTICS AND REAL-TIME COMBAT. WITH PHANTASY STAR UNIVERSE, IT MIGHT HAVE HIT THE NAIL ON THE HEAD"

That last sentence is crucial. A huge amount of the fun to be had in the online RPG space is in meeting other players with whom people can exchange tactics and trade assets. As solid as *PSU*'s one-player experience is shaping up to be, there are still endless hours to be spent online, and Sonic Team is promising improvements in this area, too. "Players can learn a lot about the story, the characters and how to control them from the Single-player mode. We believe this information will help players get really involved in the network multiplayer mode," says Miyoshi. "Network multiplayer in *PSU* will, of course, be much improved from *PSO*. Players can enjoy the same world from two different views – the huge single-player game with an average 30 to 40 hours of gameplay, and the new multiplayer, travelling and meeting many new people. We firmly believe these two integrated game styles will offer new experiences to the player. Please prepare yourself for a much improved *Phantasy Star Universe*…" And we certainly shall.

PHANTASY STAR UNIVERSE

PLAYSTATION2/MULTIFORMAT



CHARACTER BUILDING

While the online side of *PSU* still allows you to create your own avatar to play as, the game's single-player story introduces you to some typically Japanese RPG folk...

LEO

Or Leogini Santosa Berafort to his enemies. A proud member of the Beast race, Leo meets Ethan during the Seed invasion. He treats Ethan like a younger brother; getting him out of scrapes and trying to curb his hot temper. A bit like Wakka from *Final Fantasy X*.

RENVOLT

A 67-year-old member of the Cast race, Renvolt is a mercenary hired by the Allied Military Force to aid with its internal investigation of the Relics. A strong and dangerous character that will surely cross Ethan's path on more than one occasion.

ETHAN WABER

Ethan Waber is a 17 year-old, currently living on the Guardians Colony. He became a cadet-in-training at the Guardians, and is currently studying diligently under the guidance of Karen. He's *Phantasy Star Universe*'s central character.

KAREN ERRA

Ethan Waber's trainer from the Guardians, Erra belongs to the race known as the Newmans, and will accompany Ethan throughout his travels across the Phantasy Star universe. She'll be occupying the familiar 'Tifa' role in the story, no doubt.

LOST PLANET: EXTREME CONDITION



■ The all-out action in *Lost Planet* provides gamers with some spectacular surroundings.

■ Out in the wintry wasteland, you better watch your gun doesn't freeze up. Baby, it's cold outside…

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

LOST IN WHITE

MECHASSAULT 2 × HALO + FROZEN WASTES = LOST PLANET

"PLAYERS CAN EXPECT A SEAMLESS EXPERIENCE THAT LEAVES THEM COMPLETELY IMMERSED"

CAPCOM PRESS RELEASE

LOST PLANET: EXTREME CONDITION

XBOX 360



DEVELOPER PROFILE

Capcom's name, itself, carries unquestionable weight – any new franchise from the firm is likely to provoke excitement, with *Okami* already high on the most-wanted lists of the world's gamers. Jun Takeuchi, *Lost Planet's* producer, is currently also working on *Resident Evil 5*.

HISTORY

- **RESIDENT EVIL 4** 2005 [Multi]
- **ONIMUSHA 3** 2004 [PS2]
- **DEVIL MAY CRY 2** 2003 [PS2]



Despite Japan not taking to the 360 as zealously as some, a few top notch titles are due out over there.

CAPCOM OFFERS US SOME CONDITIONAL LOVE

DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox 360
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Capcom
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: Q4 '06 (Japan/US: Q4 '06)
GENRE: Third-Person Shooter
PLAYERS: 1 (Online TBA)

CONCEPT

An all-action blaster featuring aliens, giant robots and memory loss from the developers of *Onimusha* and *Devil May Cry*.

It is perhaps surprising, considering the Xbox 360's lacklustre uptake in Japan, that two of the games that we were most looking forward to on the system before it launched were Japanese. The first, *Dead Or Alive 4*, finally arrived in the office this month and didn't disappoint too much. The other, *Final Fantasy XI*, will provide us with the new experience of being able to play an MMO from our sofas (despite being a mere PC port). And now, *Lost Planet* is right up there on our most-wanted lists, inciting in us just as much excitement as a new, non-franchise Capcom title ought. Set on a futuristic, hostile ice planet, the game's cinematic abundance of explosions, aliens and all-out action has us very excited indeed.

Lost Planet: Extreme Condition is still in the very early stages of development and, as such, isn't expected to be released until the end of the year. What we have seen so far, although tantalising, still leaves much to the imagination. We know only the bare bones of the storyline: humans inhabiting a frozen planet have come under attack by antagonistic aliens, and a unit of elite soldiers are fighting for survival in a very *Starship Troopers* way. The male protagonist, having lost his memory, remembers nothing but how to fight – just as well, as fighting is the only way he can get off the lost planet alive.

The fighting itself (viewed from a third-person action perspective) looks brilliant. Frantic on-foot blasting in the face of giant, evil-looking alien beasts reminds us of a grounded *Lylat Wars*. In one of the action sequences we've seen, the protagonist, massively outnumbered, shoots wildly at hundreds of flying aliens until an explosion brings them crashing to the ground around him. The frenetic, brink-of-destruction nature of the gameplay is also reminiscent of *Devil May Cry*, with which *Lost Planet* shares a considerable number of development team members.

The other element of the action, however, brings a genuine spark of joy to our robot-loving hearts – the main character can also pilot mechs. As robot squadrons try desperately to shoot the arms off giant insectoids before they come crashing dangerously down to the snow-covered ground, we found ourselves grinning from ear to ear in gleeful anticipation. It's like a glorious coming together of *Halo* and *MechAssault 2* – an explosive and intelligent action shooter where on-foot and in-mech elements of play form equally important parts of an overwhelmingly gorgeous, intense whole.

The frozen, extreme setting adds yet more cinematic spectacle to the game, setting its volatile action against a dramatic backdrop of towering mountains, caves of stalagmitic ice, and craggy terrain in impenetrably severe weather conditions. Abandoned cities and expanses of tundra alike look glorious, realised with the power of the 360 at the developer's fingertips.

Extreme Condition has the potential to be great and is the most exciting thing to appear on the release schedule for us. Along with *Dead Rising*, it looks to be a fitting debut for Capcom, a developer whose strength as a creative force in this industry is still felt strongly. Indeed, it's frustrating that *Lost Planet's* release date is still far off enough to give our current optimism time to fade.

> "WE FOUND OURSELVES GRINNING FROM EAR TO EAR IN GLEEFUL ANTICIPATION"

LIVE A LITTLE

In the spirit of wholeheartedly embracing the Xbox 360's online potential, Capcom has asserted that *Lost Planet* will have a variety of Xbox Live options including co-operative play, and that such multiplayer functions will be a definite focus for the game. It is perhaps slightly odd, then, that absolutely no details about the game's multiplayer functions have been released besides the fact that there will be significant co-operative elements. We very much hope that the game's Co-op mode will be a different venture from the Single-player mode – in the vein of *Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory* – perhaps utilising the female main character in addition to the amnesiac male shown engaging in all the action so far.

SEGA RALLY 2006



Your diary will be booked up with events to attend in any one of your well-rendered motors.

This may not have the sheen of *Gotham's* gorgeous tracks, but it's nevertheless picture perfect.

ROCKING ALL THE WAY DOWN THE MOUNTAIN

You can't look at racing games in quite the same light in a *post-Gotham 3* universe. Nothing looks quite as shiny as it should, you can't use the right stick to scan your surroundings, you can't walk around your garage to view your cars. Hell, you can't even play *Geometry Wars*. It's just not the same.

Nevertheless, to dismiss *Sega Rally 2006* on the grounds that it 'isn't *Project Gotham*' would be wholly unprofessional (and quite stupid, being that this is a rally game and not a street racer). Seeing as it's the long-awaited follow-up to one of arcade gaming's most beloved franchises, it's up to us to cast our 360s aside and examine exactly what *Sega Rally 2006* is offering up.

Firstly, the game looks extremely pleasant indeed. Aside from some noticeable pop-up, the visuals move as smoothly as ever, maintaining a constant frame rate and achieving some admirable speed given its attention to detail. The cars themselves are immaculately presented, complete with wobbly mud flaps that look like they've just been driven through yet another grimy puddle.

Of course, the Arcade mode is as lightweight as expected – featuring single-minute races through short sections of track against 14 opponents – and is also fairly dated in its structure. Instead, the main focus of single-player lies within the Career mode: a far more serious approach to Sega rallying, complete with a calendar crammed with events, tuning options for your vehicle, and a stunning 200 sections of track upon which to race. At the moment, it's extremely Jap-text heavy and fairly impenetrable for the UK audience, but it'll be interesting to see what the mode offers in terms of long-term appeal when the game eventually arrives in Europe.

Something that does translate remarkably well, however, is the game engine which handles perfectly. Even more slippery, twitchy and manic than that of the original, *Sega Rally 2006*'s steering will initially feel bewildering to even the most ardent fans, and cars will be skidding from left to right over the track as players curse the inaccuracy of the DualShock 2. A few races in, though, and it all begins to make sense, maintaining a perfect balance between simplicity and timing, and demanding the utmost concentration as it never quite feels like you're in total control. Just like an arcade rally game should feel, then. Mix this in with some splendid force feedback through the pad, and you're left with a rally game that feels thoroughly satisfying to play.

Unquestionably, it's a fun and smooth version of a very entertaining game, but one question remains – is *Sega Rally* still relevant? While there's definitely room for an arcade rally game in the racing market, whether that gap can be filled by a title with such an archaic 'arcade' structure at its core, and no online features, is a question that can only be answered once we're able to delve into the career options.

The news that importers will receive a free and updated version of the original *Sega Rally* is more than welcome, as is the complete compatibility with all major steering wheels. For fans of the series, obsessed with bettering their lap times and mastering the timing for each turn, *Sega Rally 2006* will prove a joy. For the rest? We'll be playing *Gotham* if you need us.

"MORE SLIPPERY, TWITCHY AND MANIC THAN THAT OF THE ORIGINAL, SEGA RALLY 2006'S STEERING WILL INITIALLY FEEL BEWILDERING TO EVEN THE MOST ARDENT FANS"

DETAILS

FORMAT: PlayStation2
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Sega
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: TBA '06 (Japan: Out Now)
GENRE: Racing
PLAYERS: 1-4

CONCEPT

The old Dreamcast favourite is back with a new paint job and an in-depth Career mode to match.

TRACKMANIA

Sega Rally 2006's Career mode features 200 unique tracks on which to race, each of which will feature variable weather and time of day. That's quite some variety. Along with the standard brow-road-through-some-trees-type courses, there'll be tracks running through the narrow streets of a European-looking city (very *Burnout*), sandy beaches and, of course, the obligatory snow-covered track. It remains to be seen just how much difference there'll be between the 200 tracks, but seeing as they're so short (usually taking less than a minute to complete), it's not actually that astonishing a figure.



DEVELOPER PROFILE

■ Sega, one of the most famous names in gaming, is responsible for a large portion of classic arcade titles over the last decade. The decision to release the latest *Sega Rally* on PlayStation2 (before any signs of an arcade version) speaks volumes about the current state of the arcades.

HISTORY

■ **F-ZERO GX** 2003 [GameCube]
■ **SEGA RALLY 2** 1999 [Dreamcast]
■ **SEGA RALLY** 1995 [Saturn]

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

HARD DRIVIN'

SEGA RALLY – ARCADE x TOCA = SEGA RALLY 2006

"SEGA RALLY 2006 IS UNQUESTIONABLY ENTERTAINING, BUT DOES IT STILL HAVE A PLACE IN TODAY'S MARKET"

■ No matter how skilled a driver you are, collisions are inevitable. "Get out the way, idiot!"

ENEMY TERRITORY: QUAKE WARS

"THERE'S NOTHING SO REFRESHING AS AN AFTERNOON OUTDOORS IN ENEMY TERRITORY"

Splash Damage is a classic example of the best aspects of the PC mod community. Based in London, and formed from individuals taken from non-commercial modding circles, the developer's work was so impressive that Activision and id Software charged it with the task of creating an online multiplayer upgrade for *Return To Castle Wolfenstein*. The result – *Wolfenstein: Enemy Territory* – was an absolutely massive hit, made even more appealing by the fact that it was entirely free of charge.

Enemy Territory: Quake Wars is Splash Damage's first-ever independent commercial product. Set in the *Quake* universe, it pits the human Earth Defence Forces against the invading Strogg just before the events of *Quake II*. Its similarities to the developer's earlier effort – in terms of mission structure and gameplay – are obvious, but there are clearly far more resources at Splash Damage's disposal than there were back in 2003. Supported by all the temporal and monetary investment of any other high-profile id title, *Quake Wars* is a self-contained game in its own right rather than a multiplayer enhancement.

Thankfully, *Quake Wars*' varied features justify its status as a full-on commercial product (complete with price tag) especially since it'll be going up against the mighty *Battlefield 2* as a vehicle-based, squadron-centric online FPS. Players can take the role of a medic or engineer as opposed to a straight soldier, while the Strogg faction has different weaponry, vehicles and character classes altogether. Most of the game's missions take place in enormous outdoor environments, but there is a strong focus upon working as a team, meaning that the sort of irritating, usually vehicle-based japery engaged in by less serious *Battlefield 2* players will not generally be tolerated. By helping each player and character class see clearly the ways in which they can help to win the battle via clear individual and team goals, Splash Damage hopes that every player, new or experienced, will feel involved in battles and quickly get to grips with the capabilities of their class.

The missions will present a different experience each time they're played, thanks both to unpredictable human players and the *Doom III* engine physics. Vehicles move and react very realistically and the physical properties of the environment take on increased significance; steel flooring, for instance, makes a lot of noise when walked upon and will easily alert enemy players. The vast expanses of the levels also leave ample opportunity for improvisation – it's unlikely that any two teams will attempt an objective in exactly the same way.

It's intriguing to see the way the developer is making use of the *Quake* universe. By pitting humans against Strogg in a vaguely *Halo*-esque battle of the species, it's carving out a new niche for itself in the online-only FPS genre – something that will help it greatly in terms of competing with war-themed efforts such at *Battlefield 2*. Similarly, it's quite a departure from *Wolfenstein: Enemy Territory*, and we're intrigued to see how the alien faction will be handled once the game finally nears completion sometime this year.

DETAILS

FORMAT: PC
ORIGIN: UK
PUBLISHER: Activision
DEVELOPER: Splash Damage
RELEASE: TBA '06
GENRE: First-Person Shooter
PLAYERS: Online Multiplayer

CONCEPT

An online-only shooter from the makers of *Wolfenstein, Enemy Territory* is set in the *Quake* universe and makes use of the *Doom III* engine.

TECHNICALITIES

***Enemy Territory: Quake Wars* may use parts of *Doom III*'s engine, but it doesn't look anything like *Doom III*. Its visuals, though, are still exceptionally impressive, thanks largely to the technique called 'mega-texturing' invented by id legend John Carmack. Essentially, this technique allows the developers to create exceptionally detailed outdoor landscape by using one enormous texture for an environment rather than repeated, seamed texture tiles. Essentially, this makes the game's maps marvellously expansive, removing the need for fogging, and increasing the possible draw distance to make the environment seem cohesive and whole. In fact, due to their size, the best way to traverse the maps' terrain is via vehicles which themselves enjoy meticulously crafted physics and pretty texturing.**

"EVERY PLAYER, NEW OR EXPERIENCED, WILL FEEL INVOLVED IN BATTLES"



The *Doom III* engine furnishes the game with breathtaking visuals and outstanding physics.



DEVELOPER PROFILE

■ Formed in 2001 from key members of the PC mod community, Splash Damage worked together with Gamer.TV before joining with id Software and Activision to create *Wolfenstein: Enemy Territory*, a free multiplayer enhancement for *Return To Castle Wolfenstein*. *Quake Wars* is its first commercial project.

HISTORY

■ **WOLFENSTEIN: ENEMY TERRITORY** 2003 [PC]

■ "This tree won't hold for much longer; we're gonna have to call in the special branch."

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

AHHH! STROGG!

BATTLEFIELD 2 x QUAKE – IDIOT TEAM-MATES = ENEMY TERRITORY: QUAKE WARS

"QUAKE WARS' VARIED FEATURES JUSTIFY ITS STATUS AS A FULL-ON COMMERCIAL PRODUCT"

METAL GEAR SOLID 3: SUBSISTENCE

CRAWLING ON ITS BELLY LIKE THE SNAKE IT IS

In our own minds we can rationalise the existence of *Metal Gear Solid 2: Substance*. This was, for the most part, down to the shift in format. Going from being based purely on the PlayStation2 to becoming an Xbox title as well, Konami granted a completely new audience access to its rather convoluted adventure while taking the opportunity to tweak key elements along the way; a slightly cheeky move in terms of the simultaneous PS2 release, certainly, but still justifiable. Then again, we wish we could say the same for the swiftly approaching *Subsistence* 'update' to *Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater*, rather than simply putting our heads in our hands and sighing heavily.

It's not that we have a problem with Konami polishing and even adding to a game that we felt inclined to score highly in the first place of course, we just can't help but ask why this wasn't the game we got in the first place. The inclusion of an additional third-person camera, for instance (which widens your field of vision, allowing for slightly easier spotting of enemies), seems like the kind of thing that should always have existed considering how difficult scouting proved to be in *Snake Eater*, so it's less of an improvement and more of an eventuality. Even the addition of two 'new' games – the original *Metal Gear* and *Metal Gear 2*, ported from the defunct MSX2 in their entirety – doesn't seem like enough of an enhancement to make a re-release truly worthwhile.

But all this is before you take *Subsistence*'s online modes into account. That's right – online. *Subsistence* marks the first time the series has ever moved into an online arena. While the locations and characters will be familiar to players of the main adventure (bar the odd special face… *Rumble Roses* in the jungle, anyone?), the action is more akin to a traditionally combative online game. From kill-or-be-killed deathmatches to the more unique rescue, sneak, and capture missions, players can compete the world over to try and out-jungle each other. Bagsy us lying in the bushes, having a bit of a snooze.

Of course, you have to ask: will this be enough to make people buy the game again? No doubt those that missed it the first time will consider it, but we're not convinced. Unless there's something we're missing, that is…



"Hold still. There's something crawling on your back. I'll shoot it off for you."

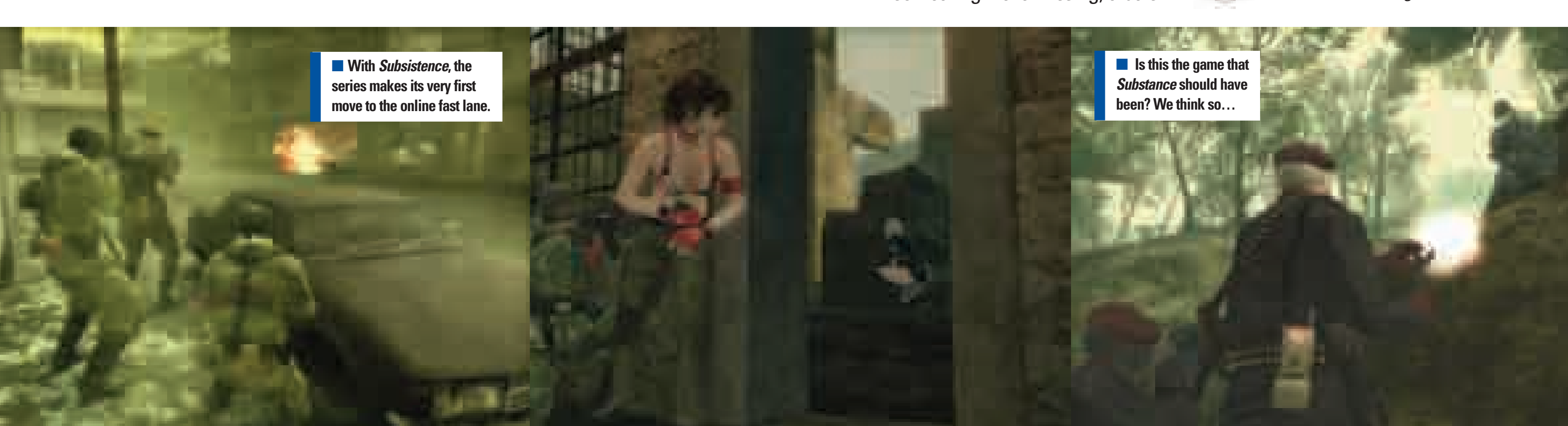
> "MGS3: SUBSISTENCE MARKS THE FIRST TIME THE SERIES HAS EVER MOVED INTO AN ONLINE ARENA. THAT'S RIGHT – ONLINE"

DETAILS

FORMAT: PS2
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Konami
DEVELOPER: Kojima Productions
RELEASE: Q2 '06 (Japan: Out Now)
GENRE: Action/Adventure
PLAYERS: 1 (2-8 Online)

CONCEPT

One new camera angle, two ported retro games and an Online mode. Is it enough?



With *Subsistence*, the series makes its very first move to the online fast lane.

Is this the game that *Substance* should have been? We think so…


eMag

URBAN CHAOS



You're not alone – the fire department will be around to give you a fireman's lift.

No, this isn't hell, but it may as well be. The clue's in the title – it's chaos out there, boys.

WHEN FRENCH PROTESTORS TURN REALLY BAD

There's nothing like a good old-fashioned shooter to inject a little life into a gaming market that often takes itself a little too seriously. Sure, all developers will lay claim to a realistic and authentic product, but when you get your hands on the pad it's all about the action, and *Urban Chaos* is unrelenting in its delivery. *Battlefield 2: Modern Combat* was a breath of fresh air from the depressive ruins of 12 months of 'the most realistic war experiences ever'. Now, with the likes of *Black* and *TimeShift* ready to blast some fun into gaming, it seems that the current-generation developers are looking to simply entertain the crowds too.

Rocksteady Studios, the developer behind *Urban Chaos*, runs a thin sliver of seriousness through the game. A burning city besieged by rioters who are looting stores and killing civilians, needs a hero. That's where you step in as Nick Mason, a T-Zero enforcer brought in to join the fight. At first you're barely known to those around you, but as the game develops, so does your reputation, and the story gets more personal. Well, personal to the extent that you know who you're standing next to as you blow things up. However, this isn't a lone mission. You need the support of the fire department and paramedics – a good incentive to keep them alive.

One neat touch is a consciousness of time. It's not *Back To The Future*-style complexity, here, but rather something that follows the story. The game is spread across 12 missions, each one based in consecutive months of the year. As such, the environments differ; the weather and clothing change to suit each season, with visible breath in the cold months and so on. In another small but smart touch, the in-game TV news footage also shows the exact time your console is set to. Clever.

The missions themselves are generally straightforward, but there are plenty of secondary missions or 'Emergency Situations' to work toward, some of which need to be earned or unlocked. *Urban Chaos* utilises a similar reward system to *Battlefield 2,* where the success of a mission is broken down into component parts and you're then evaluated on each one. The better you do, the more features and upgrades you can unlock. In addition, there are loads of medals to earn as proof of your skills (186 in total, we're told) for things such as headshots, consecutive kills, accuracy, saving lives and so on.

You can return to any completed mission at any time to improve your score, and this gives what could have been a straight-up shooter an instant replay value. You won't just do this for personal satisfaction either. Rocksteady tells us that you'll almost certainly need a lot of upgrades and new weapons to complete some of the later missions.

While the visuals don't yet look award winning, the physics engine is quite impressive. *Urban Chaos* is an explosive shooter packed full of action, so variety and comical realism is needed to make a cool kill or booming explosion send the enemies flying around. It has the renowned ragdoll mechanics that we generally love, but there's still a believable edge that a man with a cleaver in his face, falling from a tall building would actually bounce off the windscreen of a car and set off an explosion in that manner. Okay, so maybe *Urban Chaos* isn't going to be the game of year, or one of the late great Xbox titles. What it is, though, is instantly playable and a whole lot of fun. Let's save the serious stuff for the next generation, shall we?

> "IN ANOTHER SMALL BUT SMART TOUCH, THE IN-GAME TV NEWS FOOTAGE ALSO SHOWS THE EXACT TIME YOUR CONSOLE IS SET TO"

DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox, PlayStation2
ORIGIN: UK
PUBLISHER: Eidos
DEVELOPER: Rocksteady Studios
RELEASE: Q2 '06
GENRE: Shoot-'Em-Up
PLAYERS: 1 (2-8 Online)

CONCEPT

Fire is raging, rioting is rife and the city is out of control. It's time to grab a gun and rehabilitate this crazy joint.

ALWAYS CARRY PROTECTION

Tagged by Rocksteady Studios as one of the standout features of *Urban Chaos,* the riot shield is a crucial part of the hero's kitbag. "The riot shield will change the way people play first-person shooters forever," says the game's director Sefton Hill. "Once you've tried it, there's no going back." So what's the big deal? Well, basically you can't complete the game without it. You can lean around it to pick off enemies, or lob smoke grenades for even better cover. It's not an easy option for an over-cautious gamer because the onslaught is relentless and you'll need it as a tactical tool as well. It may not 'change first-person shooters forever', but it's a cool tool to have.



DEVELOPER PROFILE

■ Rising from the ashes of Argonaut Games, Rocksteady Studios has taken charge of *Urban Chaos*. Argonaut was working on the project, then known as *Roll Call*. When the company closed, two members of that team, Sefton Hill and Jamie Walker, set up Rocksteady and continued developing the game under the name *Zero Tolerance*. One name change later and things are still looking good.

HISTORY

■ **URBAN CHAOS** is Rocksteady Studios' first title

■ And what does every good shoot-'em-up require? Yes, that's right – a bit of barbecued face.

"OUR GOAL WAS TO MAKE THE BEST ALL-OUT SHOOTER ON PS2 AND XBOX"
SEFTON HILL, ROCKSTEADY STUDIOS

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

THE CITY'S IN TURMOIL AND THE FREAKS MUST PAY

ESCAPE FROM NEW YORK + TIMESPLITTERS x BACKDRAFT = URBAN CHAOS

ENCHANT ARM



■ The cityscapes in *-eNCHANT arM-* really show off the next-gen graphics.

■ It may look huge and scary, but we'd bet real money on it losing.

"SIMPLE ENOUGH TO APPEAL TO NEWCOMERS WHILE PROVIDING THE TACTICAL DEPTH THAT RPG FANS CRAVE"

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

ARMED AND DANGEROUS

FINAL FANTASY x SHINING FORCE + HOMOSEXUALITY = ENCHANT ARM

ENCHANT ARM
XBOX 360



DEVELOPER PROFILE

■ From Software has over ten years experience in the industry, and is famous for its mech-based games and the gorgeous *Otogi* series. *-eNCHANT arM-* is joined by the stunning *Chromehounds* in From's forthcoming 360 double header, as the Japanese developer looks to make headway into the crowded European market.

HISTORY

- **METAL WOLF CHAOS** 2004 [XBOX]
- **OTOGI 2: IMMORTAL WARRIORS** 2003 [XBOX]
- **OTOGI: MYTH OF DEMONS** 2002 [XBOX]

THE WORLD'S MOST STUPIDLY TITLED GAME

DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox 360
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: From Software
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: TBA '06 (Japan: Out Now)
GENRE: RPG
PLAYERS: 1

CONCEPT

■ A gorgeous-looking traditional RPG, and the Xbox 360's first foray into the genre.

Microsoft is desperate for the 360 to succeed in Japan – that much is common knowledge. Undoubtedly its strategy involves the support of traditional Japanese RPG titles, and first off the mark is From Software with the incredibly pretty *-eNCHANT arM-*.

Emerging from the stable that brought us the wonder of *Otogi* on Xbox, it's no surprise that *-eNCHANT arM-* is lovely to look at. In the established RPG mould, its mix of spiky-haired heroes, otherworldly cities and bizarre enemies are picked out in glorious high definition. The colour and vibrancy of the universe is quite something.

Reports from Japan, where the game is out, suggest there are some classic RPG niggles with the graphics. NPCs will stand on the spot and wait to be spoken to, without an idle animation in sight – not an issue that a 360 game should suffer. It's ridiculous to construct a world that looks real when static, and then fill it with unbelievable features that cast the player out of the game space and back into the living room. It doesn't take much to shatter the suspension of disbelief in a videogame, but considering how immersive the 360's graphics can prove, it's not acceptable here.

The key factors in any successful RPG are threefold: story, characters and combat. The story, although impenetrable right now due to the language barrier, does seem to be tracing familiar territory – an impossibly haired young man probably has to save the world. We'll hazard a guess and say the main enemy probably has impossible hair too – perhaps grey or even violet in colour.

More interesting, and potentially progressive, are the characters themselves. Atsuma, the lead, is basically Cloud in different clothes, but his pals Touwa and Makoto are worthy of note. Carrying a torch for Touwa, Makoto seems plainly gay, and if *-eNCHANT arM-* does, indeed, feature a homosexual lead role and treats this with respect and without stereotype, it could mark a progression in videogames as a medium of cultural worth. The *Brokeback Mountain* of gaming, perhaps.

A little more straightforward and less 'paradigm shifting' is *-eNCHANT arM-*'s grid-based combat system. Encountering random battles turns the screen into a squared grid, and the player must gain ground and superior position by utilising the said grid successfully. It's reminiscent of *Shining Force* and *Vandal Hearts*, and is simple enough to appeal to newcomers of the genre while providing the tactical depth that RPG fans crave.

There's still no confirmation whether or not *-eNCHANT arM-* will receive a release in the west, but we'd be very surprised if it was restricted to the eastern territory. With such a small software selection currently available for the 360, a beautiful-looking RPG like this will surely find success on our own shores. With its combination of next-gen visual clarity and retro RPG styling, From's title looks set to bridge the gap between established genre themes and the future of RPGs, whatever that might be. Still no word on why it's written in such a stupid way though…

> "BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN ESTABLISHED GENRE THEMES AND THE FUTURE OF RPGS"

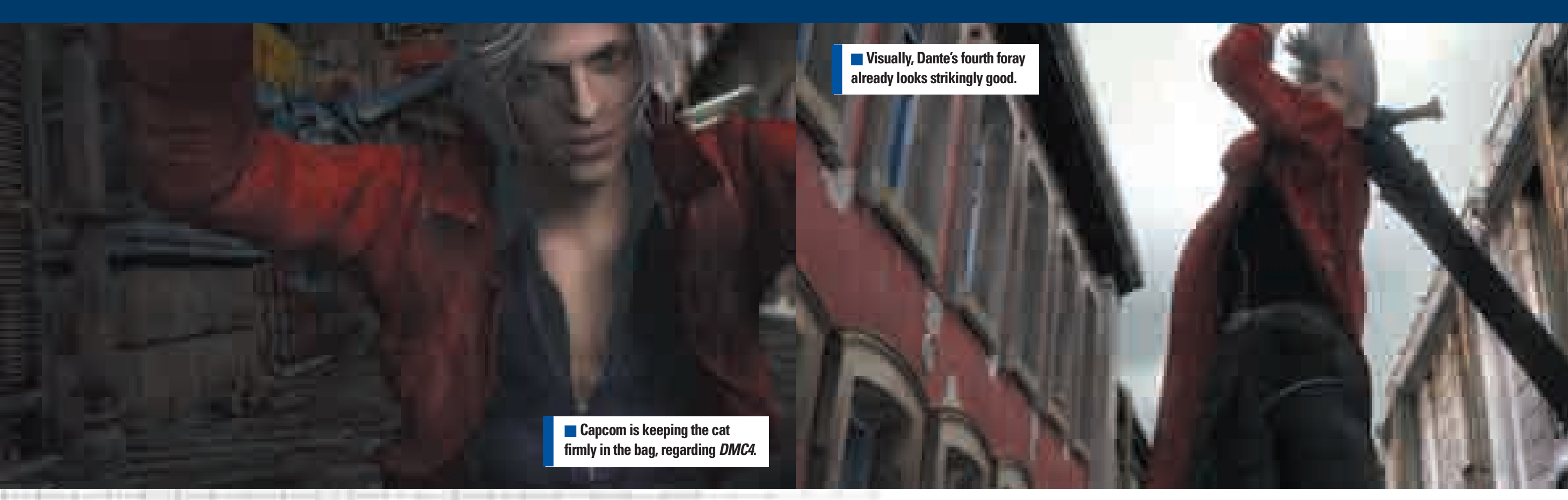
MY PRECIOUS

-eNCHANT arM-'s summon system offers a healthy dose of customisation. By collecting creatures called Golems, you can upgrade a character's skillset and attacks by combing them with said creature. Different Golems offer varying skills, and a lot of time will be spent mixing and matching Golem abilities between the characters in your party, and determining which suits each combat situation. In addition to this, players can purchase a wide selection of skill and weapon upgrades, as well as forging their own weapons with material found in the game's universe. This should add a decent slice of replay value and mean that each individual player's journey through the game is different.



■ You couldn't ask for a more typical RPG hero – brooding, with spiky hair.

DEVIL MAY CRY 4



Visually, Dante's fourth foray already looks strikingly good.

Capcom is keeping the cat firmly in the bag, regarding *DMC4*.

DETAILS

FORMAT: PlayStation3
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Capcom
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: TBA '06
GENRE: Action Adventure
PLAYERS: 1

CONCEPT

Dance with the devil named Dante in what looks to be yet another stylish outing for this tough series.

WE'RE WEEPING WITH ANTICIPATION

It's fair to say that *Devil May Cry 3* impressed us greatly. Even now, with our Special Edition versions on pre-order, we're perfecting combos and searching desperately for any new ones we haven't yet stumbled upon until the day it drops through the letterbox. *DMC3* was such a vast improvement on *DMC2* that we're salivating uncontrollably in anticipation of the fourth instalment.

Unfortunately, for all our begging, Capcom is remaining extremely tight-lipped on the subject at present. Whether this is down to not wishing to reveal too much so far in advance of the launch of the PlayStation3, or whether the game is still too early in development for information to be given is unclear, but the usual internet rumours are already circulating and cries of 'Dante is going to have a beard' and 'his hair is going to be black' are already being heard. Much of this speculation is down to Sony giving hints at events, and various bits of concept artwork that have been featured in Japanese magazines, but for any solid information on the look and feel of the game, we're just going to have to wait. What we do know is that Hiroyuki Kobayashi, who produced the original *Devil May Cry*, has taken the reins once again and, although he feels *DMC3* was a 'complete package', he and his team plan to implement some big changes.

Also, it's fairly certain that Dante will be a fair bit prettier. Not prettier in a cute sense – although his reputation for making the ladies go weak at the knees is well established – the footage that Capcom has already shown reveals that, as expected, we'll be gaping in awe at the visuals on offer. In fact, despite looking incredible, in some of the screenshots available Dante is looking, dare we say it, a little facially challenged. Okay, let's say ugly. We've all heard tales of how some folk feel nauseous at the sight of certain Hollywood stars when viewed on a high definition TV. Perhaps the fact that the now obvious holes and imperfections on Sean Connery's face cause previously besotted women to vomit is bad news for Dante, and finally the cracks in his flawless complexion will begin to show. Probably not, but with so little information available (and now no more until E3 arrives in early May), it amuses us to make things like this up.

"ALTHOUGH DMC3 WAS A 'COMPLETE PACKAGE', BIG CHANGES ARE AFOOT FOR THE FOURTH OUTING"


eMag

DEAD RISING

"NO, YOU'RE NOT – YOU'LL BE STONE DEAD IN A MINUTE"

Sorry if we seem distracted; things are a little… hectic right now. We're standing in the middle of an American hardware store, surrounded by everything your home could ever need: chainsaws, axes, sledgehammers and, er, lead piping. Of course, what really has our attention is the slavering throng of zombies pushing against the glass doors in front and behind us, if only because the nearby lift – our only means of escape – is broken. 'Crash'. One set of doors gives way and zombies swarm in. We can pick them off, but the numbers are mounting up. 'Crash'. The other doors cave in and suddenly we're surrounded by moaning corpses. Then… 'Ding'. The lift comes back online and escape is mercifully possible. Punching, kicking and otherwise battering our way through the unforgiving crowd, we make it to the lift doors and hit the call button. The doors open. It's full of zombies. Damn.

This is, of course, an extreme example of the action that *Dead Rising* offers, says the game's producer Yukatu Haruki. The difficulty has been ramped way up to show the kind of enemy numbers that Capcom's new zombie romp is capable of, although he admits surprise that we made it through alive (apparently, we're the first to complete the demo all day). In truth, the actual game will be slightly more sedate – or at least as sedate as a game packed with flesh-hungry zombies can be, anyway. But at least the action won't be quite as frantic as we've experienced; for Frank West, an unfortunate freelance photojournalist (read: snap-happy paparazzi scumbag) trapped inside a small-town shopping mall surrounded by undead inhabitants, the emphasis will be as much on saving survivors, obtaining evidence and enemy avoidance as it will on clashing and/or decapitating heads.

And yes, we did say obtaining evidence – much as it doesn't sound like the most exciting task, Capcom's decision to make the lead character a journalist does actually have a purpose. After all, the whole reason you're in this situation is down to Frank following leads for what he believes is the scoop of a lifetime, so coming away empty handed would be somewhat unfair to him. So far, little has been revealed about how evidence gathering will work (most likely through staged situations where timing and camera precision is key) but we can't help comparing it to Spike's hugely overlooked horror title *Michigan*, where videocamera-toting players had to choose between helping perilous civilians and gaining valuable footage of events that ultimately lead to some messy demises.

A revised and improved version of that would work a treat, particularly given Capcom's ability for building tension.

Not that *Dead Rising* is all about tension, of course. Whereas *Resident Evil* thrives on dark corners and eerie music, this prefers to throw you headlong into the fight for survival with almost cartoon-style aplomb. Naturally, this means hordes of zombies (hordes that, thankfully, no longer suffer from all having the same faces), plenty of weapons (including the use of defeated enemies against those still un-living) and even a real-time clock which plays a vital role in gameplay; with enemies becoming more aggressive and numerous at night, you'll be begging for the sun to come up during nocturnal hours. The only real query now then is when Capcom plans to let the game loose, as it still holds firm to its 'TBA' status – between this and *Lost Planet*, we've never wanted an Xbox 360 more.

"THE EMPHASIS WILL BE AS MUCH ON SAVING SURVIVORS, FINDING EVIDENCE AND ENEMY AVOIDANCE AS IT WILL ON KICKING

DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox 360
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Capcom
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: TBA '06 (Japan: Q3 '06)
GENRE: Survival Horror
PLAYERS: 1

CONCEPT

Capcom might be labelling it as a survival horror, but that's too mild a term – especially since the horror here comes in endless waves of zombie teeth.

SHOP TILL YOU DROP

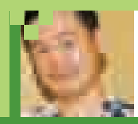
Although Capcom has yet to show the extent to which the feature has been implemented, the developer has made big promises regarding the shopping mall in *Dead Rising*. Our curiosity is drawn to just how much freedom players will have within the mall – while there must be limitations, Capcom insists players will have 'full reign of the realistic shopping centre', making use of anything they find to beat back the ensuing hordes. If it's true, then it could make for some interesting encounters; naturally, we'll be aching to get our hands on any ride-on lawnmowers currently on sale, as well as swinging by Dunkin' Donuts for some sugary morsels to throw those zombie cops off the scent.



The faces of the undead do actually range from 'I've been a bit off colour' to 'I died in a horrific threshing accident'.

We think you'll agree that Frank definitely has a face for *behind* the camera.

DEAD RISING
XBOX 360



DEVELOPER PROFILE
Having worked his way up from lowly character designer in 1987, Keiji Inafune is now one of Capcom's key generals; his work on the *Onimusha* series, in particular, helped create its success. Inafune now has his hands full as executive producer on several 360 titles including *Lost Planet* and, of course, *Dead Rising*.

HISTORY
- **ONIMUSHA: WARLORDS** 2001 [PS2]
- **CHIP 'N' DALE: RESCUE RANGERS** 1990 [NES]
- **MEGA MAN** 1987 [NES]

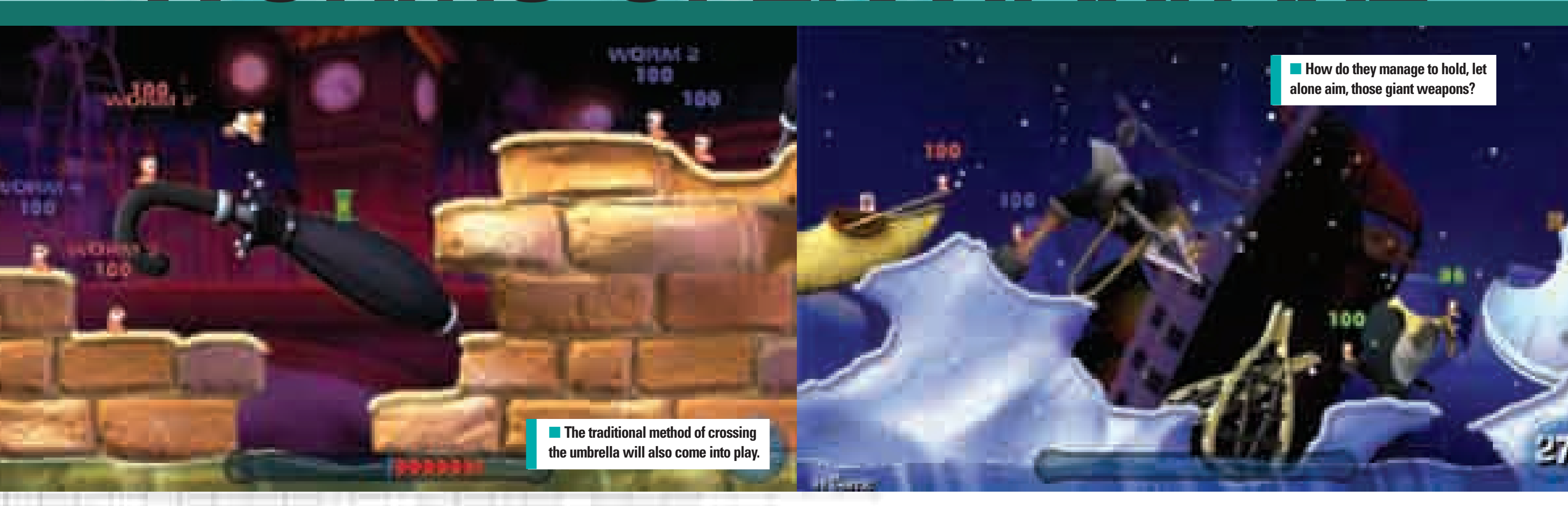
"PLAYERS WILL ALSO ENCOUNTER OTHER SURVIVORS ALONG THE WAY AND BY HELPING THEM CAN ACQUIRE VALUABLE CLUES AS TO WHAT HAS HAPPENED"
CAPCOM PRESS RELEASE

VIDEOGAMES MATHS
"WISE FWOM YOUR GWAVE"

DAWN OF THE DEAD + PAPARAZZI x CAPCOM = DEAD RISING

In between slicing up the throngs of zombies, you must find time to gather information.

WORMS OPEN WARFARE


The traditional method of crossing the umbrella will also come into play.

How do they manage to hold, let alone aim, those giant weapons?

DETAILS

FORMAT: PSP, Nintendo DS
ORIGIN: UK
PUBLISHER: THQ
DEVELOPER: Team 17
RELEASE: 17 March
GENRE: Strategy
PLAYERS: 1-4

CONCEPT

Teams of tiny yet violent worms take it in turns to blast each other to smithereens across 2D landscapes.

THE WORMS RETURN TO THEIR EARTHLY ROOTS

Worms. Little earthbound creatures that wriggle about not doing much. When armed with weapons and a sly sense of humour, however, we received one of gamings most intriguing turn-based titles. Twelve years on, and a few 3D makeovers later, it seemed they could be squirming down a slippery slope. Luckily this is not so, as those little pink rascals are finally being brought back to basics for the handheld market.

Open Warfare is *Worms* how you once knew it – cartoony worm sprites just begging to be blown up across the charming 2D levels. There's no half-hearted attempt at mutating this version of the franchise into 3D, no awkward camera angles and no real reason not to fall in love with the original style all over again. This is classic *Worms* carnage with addictive gameplay and inventive, chuckle-to-yourself weapons such as the air strikes and exploding sheep.

There is also more thought-based strategy to this than meets the eye. Do you launch grenades from afar, fire a dragon punch up close or keep to the traditional timing of the bazooka? Perhaps building a bridge or tunnelling to safety is your preferred approach. After taking wind force and ammo drops into consideration, there's definitely a deeper interior to its sweet 'n' simple exterior. Building up a customisable squad in the single-player missions is satisfying, but its obvious that *Worms Open Warfare* will truly come to life versus other human opponents.

The fact that Team 17 has decided to develop this for both leading handhelds, brings light to questions concerning the future of *Worms*. Doing so means that players will be able to relish traditional gameplay as well as come away with the advantages of portable destruction.

Wireless multiplayer between up to four consoles has, more or less, been confirmed, but whether the DS version will be easier to operate from the touch screen remains to be seen. Graphics have been polished to a squeaky clean finish and speech is still, of course, evil in that loveable *Worms* way.

Think in the style of *Worms Armageddon* made portable and it's not difficult to imagine how *Worms Open Warfare* will turn out. But who's complaining, when we get to play it all over again on the PSP and DS?

> "THERE'S DEFINITELY A DEEPER INTERIOR TO THIS GAME'S SWEET 'N' SIMPLE EXTERIOR"


eMag

BLAZING ANGELS: SQUADRONS OF WWII

UP, UP AND AWAY



As sub-genres go, World War II has been plundered innumerable times by games developers over recent years. We've trudged the grimy trenches of the Somme and had our faces shot at while scaling a Normandy beach so many times that it's a breath of fresh air to report that we can now take to the skies and fly away from all the mud and gattling guns in Ubisoft's WWII action flight sim, *Blazing Angels*.

The Xbox edition has been in development for a while now, but it's the enhanced 360 offering that's really caught our attention. The current-generation (or is that previous-generation now?) version was looking lovely, so it comes as no surprise that the 360 edition is spectacular, certainly in terms of visuals. It utilises a sumptuous cinematic filter to give the sky a scorched, 'Michael Bay' look. It's all very *Pearl Harbor* but, thankfully, Ben Affleck is nowhere to be seen. London – the first of the two available levels – stretches out for miles into the distance, but every building is immaculately detailed, losing none of this intricacy – even when up close. Better still, they can also all be destroyed with a few well-placed machine gun rounds from your beautifully realised aircraft.

Despite the detailed visuals, though, the game's aim is extremely simple. Fitting into the *Star Wars Rogue Squadron* mould, you're tasked with ridding the skies of enemy fighters and bombers as quickly and efficiently as possible, with the help of a few willing team-mates. Unlike the majority of flight sims, *Blazing Angels* eschews complex controls and all talk of pitch and yaw in favour of explosions. Many, many explosions. It's like a WWII version of *Top Gun*. It even has Berlin in it. Boom boom.

The missions work in a very similar way to those in *Call Of Duty*. You're thrown into one of a multitude of historically accurate World War II scenarios – each of which has been tweaked for cinematic and dramatic effect – and given the opportunity to change history. Fancy stopping those pesky Japanese from bombing Pearl Harbour? You're quite welcome to, if you can shoot them down quickly enough. Unfortunately, at this stage the game doesn't appear to offer much more than basic seek and destroy mission objectives, but later levels may provide more variety (well, we certainly hope they will).

This isn't our main worry with *Blazing Angles* on the 360, though. In the current-gen version of the game, it's possible to enter a first-person cockpit mode, which not only looks very nice, but also allows for fine adjustments to your aim; vital for eliminating the enemy. In the preview build on Microsoft's next-generation beast, we were unable to enter the cockpit for love nor money. This made the game far harder to play, requiring *Monkey Ball*-esque levels of thumb dexterity to simply shoot down a couple of bombers, all the while trying to keep control of your aeroplane. It could well be an omission due to the early stage of the game code that we saw, but if Ubisoft has decided to remove this gameplay mechanic altogether, it's an entirely bizarre and potentially game-breaking choice.

If the aforementioned cockpit mode does make it into the final version, then *Blazing Angels* should be an enjoyable stomp through a Hollywood World War II. Indeed, with strong Xbox Live support, it could also find favour with those who've extracted every last drop of play from the 360's initial line up.

"YOU'RE TASKED WITH RIDDING THE SKIES OF ENEMY FIGHTERS AND BOMBERS AS QUICKLY AND EFFICIENTLY AS POSSIBLE"

DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox 360, Xbox
ORIGIN: Romania
PUBLISHER: Ubisoft
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: March
GENRE: Action
PLAYERS: 1 (2-16 Online)

CONCEPT

An action-orientated depiction of WWII told from the cockpits of the greatest fighter pilots of the conflict.

TEAM GAME

As is very much the trend at the moment, *Blazing Angels* belongs in the 'war is not fought alone' camp. Given control of a small squadron of fighter planes, simple jabs of the D-pad can direct them to seek and destroy, protect, or go directly towards the current objective. They keep in constant communication with the player, but at this stage the number of sound bites is alarmingly low, meaning that the same quote can be heard multiple times during one mission. The squad controls are limited but very much in keeping with the game's arcade ethos. It remains to be seen just how much of a role your squad will play in the later missions.



As an alternative to the 360 line-up titles, *Blazing Angels* aims to keep it simple.

BLAZING ANGELS: SQUADRONS OF WWII

XBOX 360/MULTIFORMAT



DEVELOPER PROFILE

Ubisoft has expanded to become one of the world's largest videogame publishers this millennium. Usually synonymous with the *Tom Clancy* franchises, with *Blazing Angels* the French firm has made quite a departure, but maintains its trademarks of superior lighting and sumptuous graphics.

HISTORY

- **KING KONG** 2005 [Multi]
- **WARRIOR WITHIN** 2004 [Multi]
- **RAYMAN 2** 2000 [Multi]

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

FALLEN ANGELS

ACE COMBAT × WORLD WAR 2 × MICHAEL BAY = BLAZING ANGELS

"INTENSE SHOCKWAVES FROM EXPLOSIONS FILL THE SKY WITH DEBRIS USING DYNAMIC LIGHTING AND PARTICLE EFFECTS MADE POSSIBLE BY XBOX 360'S SYSTEM"

UBISOFT PRESS RELEASE

They don't call it *Blazing Angels* for nothing, you know. You *will* catch on fire, old bean.

No really, look down. The cinematography in *Blazing Angels* is rather astounding.

VIRTUA FIGHTER 5



No other game has surpassed the brilliance of *VF4*, and Sega's technical and cosmetic changes should result in a great update, too.

BEST. FIGHTER. EVER. ONLY BETTER, OBVIOUSLY…

The problem with *Virtua Fighter 4* was that it was simply too good. Since that fourth game (and its elaboration, *Virtua Fighter 4 Evolution*), the gaming landscape has been devoid of anything with lasting resonance. Many fighting game fans have twiddled their thumbs for the last few years, flitting from game to game trying to find something to play that has felt even remotely as precise, as balanced and as deep as *Virtua Fighter 4*. *Tekken 5* was a small, nutritionally lacking snack that barely registered in the stomach while waiting for something satisfying to fill the gap left by Akira's technical savagery. *Dead Or Alive* has come and gone in various forms, *Soul Calibur* made a brave but desperate effort to dress up its failing engine, but no amount of design-your-own-character modes or heaving bosoms have done what so desperately needs to be done; simply capture the hearts of the fighting game community in the way that *Virtua Fighter 4* did.

Despite still being one of the most played games in Tokyo – the last bastion of arcade culture – *Virtua Fighter* is, at last, trumpeting its return. Yes, break out the joysticks; it's time, once again, to scour Virtua Fighter Dot Com for the latest frame-based statistics, and argue about the cheapness of Lau, as *Virtua Fighter 5* reveals how it intends to improve upon its predecessor when no other game has even come close to matching it.

As is often to be expected from a new iteration of any fighting game, two new characters – a wrestler called El Blaze and an as yet unnamed girl in traditional Korean clothing – join us. One appears to offer a new way to control downed opponents, and the other specifically courts the next big power in gaming. Korean players are known for their technical expertise at higher levels of play, so expect her to be a more demanding character.

Of course, position plays a greater role, with every character gaining a Lion-style side-slip, allowing fighters to dodge to an opponent's flank and execute one of the most fundamental new changes to the system: the side crumple. These new positional collapses allow greater damage to be inflicted and have a powerful effect on each character's move-set, influencing the way the game flows, not only in the basic knock-out game but also in the ring-out game. New low walls allow ring-outs from a high float, an obvious result of a big move landed from a successful side-slip.

For those not as deeply embedded in the intricacies of the system, there are also many completely cosmetic changes to the game. All characters now have four default costumes to customise, and ten areas on each costume to modify. Video footage indicates vastly improved cloth physics and a preference for all things shiny – all hail the power of Lindbergh, indeed.

Though European gamers will probably never see it in any way, shape or form (damn you, Sega Amusements Europe), vf.net has been overhauled and will now feed footage of replays – complete with commentary – to screens in each arcade, showcasing the best players and their fighting styles, as well as regular *VF*-related programming and news on the latest tournaments and rankings.

Unfortunately, and here's the real kicker, *Virtua Fighter 5* has not been confirmed for home systems yet – though Sega's already officially ruled out the Xbox 360 as a possible platform. So… a PS3 launch title? We can only hope.

> "VF 5 REVEALS HOW IT INTENDS TO IMPROVE UPON ITS PREDECESSOR WHEN NO OTHER GAME HAS COME CLOSE TO MATCHING IT"

YOU CAN'T KEEP A GOOD MAN DOWN

Okizeme is the name given specifically to the tactic of keeping a felled opponent down and controlling them so that they don't get a chance to return a strike. El Blaze appears to use some sort of running manoeuvre on downed opponents, suggesting that one of the more technically demanding areas of *VF* play has been overhauled. (Not that games™ has a problem with technically demanding play – as long as we have access to a good stick, of course.) Recent video footage backs up this notion, however previous *VF* titles have been tweaked until the last possible minute, and many moves present in promo footage are often absent from the final game.

DETAILS

FORMAT: Arcade
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Sega
DEVELOPER: AM2
RELEASE: TBA '06 (Japan: Q2 '06)
GENRE: Beat-'Em-Up
PLAYERS: 1-2

CONCEPT

The best fighting game ever made returns with a new system, new characters, new items, new stages and its very own TV channel (in the arcade only).

VIRTUA FIGHTER 5

ARCADE



DEVELOPER PROFILE

■ Lead by the enigmatic Yu Suzuki, AM2 has been Sega's leading arcade developer for decades, from the original *OutRun* and *Space Harrier* to groundbreaking titles such as *Virtua Fighter* and *Virtua Racing*. Despite the recent consolidation of Sega's studios, AM2 remains one of only two independent studios along with Sonic Team.

HISTORY

- **AFTERBURNER** 1987 [Arcade]
- **VIRTUA FIGHTER 4 EVOLUTION** 2003 [PS2]
- **OUTRUN 2** 2005 [Xbox]

■ This mighty looking fighter doesn't just have the strength of a bear, he has the hairy arms to match.

"VIRTUA FIGHTER 5 WILL BE THE PINNACLE OF THE SERIES, APPEARING ON OUR NEXT GENERATION OF ARCADE HARDWARE"

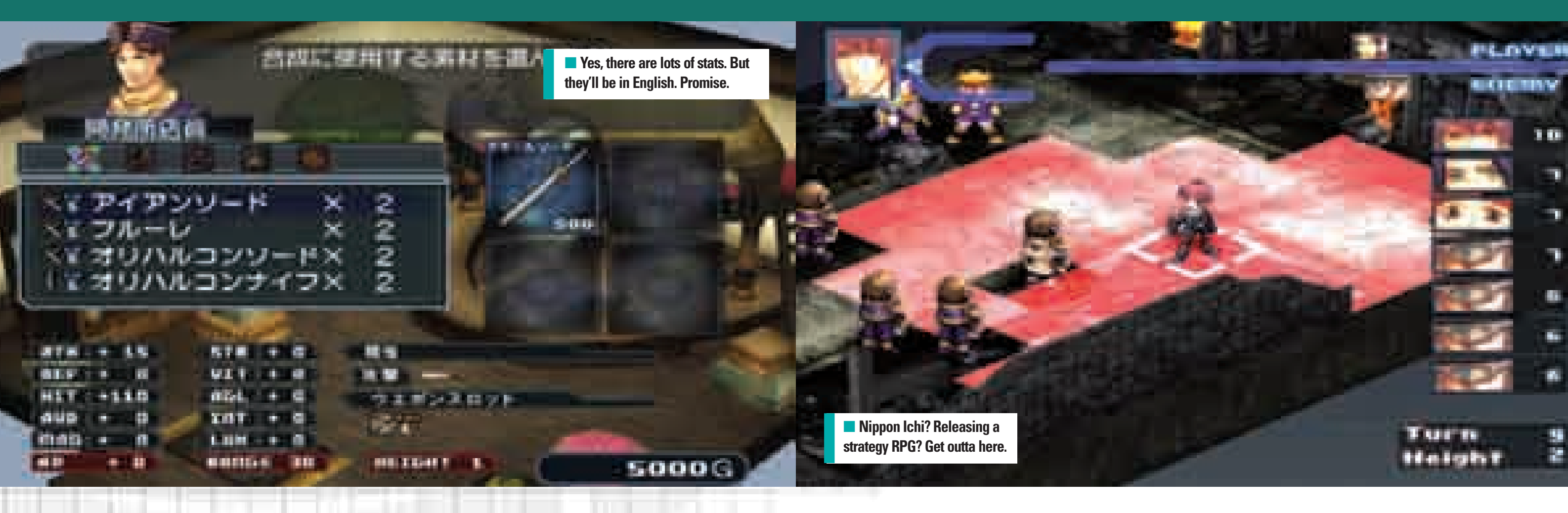
SEGA PRESS RELEASE

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

THE PROCESS OF REFINEMENT, AS DESCRIBED BY STEPHEN HAWKING

VIRTUA FIGHTER 2 + VIRTUA FIGHTER 3 + VIRTUA FIGHTER 4 = VIRTUA FIGHTER 5

SPECTRAL SOULS



Yes, there are lots of stats. But they'll be in English. Promise.

Nippon Ichi? Releasing a strategy RPG? Get outta here.

DETAILS

FORMAT: PSP
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: NIS America
DEVELOPER: Idea Factory
RELEASE: October (Japan: August '06)
GENRE: Strategy RPG
PLAYERS: 1

CONCEPT

Strategic, story-driven battling, with a multi-tiered storyline. The first in the series to make it to the west.

A LONG TIME COMING

Idea Factory's strategy RPGs have a fairly long history in Japan but have never yet made it to the west. Unless you've played the abysmal *Gauntlet* clone that was *Black Stone: Magic And Steel*, and which it's best to forget entirely. Now, with *Spectral Souls* and Idea Factory's other PSP project, *Generation Of Chaos*, we're getting a double helping of such games. Although the suitability of SRPGs to the PSP has not yet been qualified, the developer is confident it can deliver a game as suited to the platform as *Fire Emblem* became to the GBA – and spin a terrifically complex yarn.

Spectral Souls tells the story of a world at war. Taking control of three entirely different factions throughout the course of the story, the player must return the world of Neverland to peace. The three factions – Liberation Army, Imperial Army and Royal Demon Army – have distinct tactics and are led by unique main characters. More interestingly, however, actions that the player takes while playing as one faction will have a direct impact on the other two factions – switching between the three in order to manipulate the desired result for your favoured faction will be entirely necessary for victory, and will even have a considerable impact on the way in which the story pans out.

Spectral Souls' battle system is, like many of publisher Nippon Ichi's games, grid-based and incorporates a variety of new and intriguing features. Each character's skills can be combined with multiple normal attacks to deal enormous damage (and, if you're lucky, trigger a massive chain-kill combo) – a fire strike skill, for instance, combined with a powerful sword swipe may result in a Flaming Slash. This form of combo system, combined with a Charge feature that lets multiple units attack a single foe, means that there's a flow to battle quite unlike that of other SRPGs.

There's also a vaguely *Dark Chronicle*-esque weapon synthesis aspect to the game, in which useless items can be combined and tweaked to make powerful and custom-tailored weapons. *Spectral Souls*' combination of multi-tiered storytelling and a smooth battle system makes it feel both involving and natural on Sony's handheld – and given that it still has a good ten months left in development, it could well turn out to be the PSP's defining RPG.

"WITH TEN MONTHS LEFT TO DEVELOP IT, THIS MAY TURN OUT TO BE THE PSP'S DEFINING RPG"


eMag

FACES OF WAR



■ War games are ten a penny, but Ubisoft's effort stands out as one that could revitalise the genre.

■ The slightly cartoon-styled graphics are nicely polished, but don't ridicule the violence.

> **"THE GAME BRINGS AN ENHANCED HUMAN AND EMOTIONAL ELEMENT TO THE WORLD WAR II GENRE"**
>
> *JAY COHEN, UBISOFT*

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

TAKE COVER

SOLDIERS: HEROES OF WWII × SAVING PRIVATE RYAN – RYAN = FACES OF WAR



DEVELOPER PROFILE

Best Way has developed one other title to which *Faces Of War* is the spiritual sequel. Published in Russia and Eastern Europe by 1C Company, and later distributed in mainland Europe and the UK by Ubisoft, *Soldiers: Heroes Of WWII* attempted to introduce third-person action to RTS gaming with considerable success.

HISTORY

SOLDIERS: HEROES OF WORLD WAR II 2004 [PC]

OH, WHAT A LAV-ER-LEE WAR

There's something impersonal about your typical RTS. Ordinarily, you find yourself ordering tens (if not hundreds) of units to their deaths, without the slightest twinge of conscience. Developer Best Way's previous title, *Soldiers: Heroes Of World War II*, was different. The game's innovative direct control elements, lavish detail and exceptional realism made it an altogether less remote experience. True, you didn't care about your little soldiers in the same way as you did for comrades in a first-person World War II shooter, but they were still more than the customary faceless units of the ordinary RTS.

Faces Of War benefits from the passion, research and expertise lavished upon *Heroes Of WWII* and, like its predecessor, could become a cult hit. Its authenticity and fanatical complexity will doubtless bring smiles to the faces of hardcore RTS players, but the developer is also aiming to further reinforce the action elements of *Soldiers* in order to create an involving, intense and almost cinematic portrayal of the key moments of the Second World War. *Faces Of War* is immediately engaging, regardless of whether you've played *Soldiers*; it's a fast-paced, involving RTS involving much of the adrenaline and quick reactions of an action title.

Each of the three campaigns (Russian, Allied and German) take the player through the defining events of the war, from landing in Normandy to the battle of Berlin. The game's battlefields, both urban and rural, are realistic, reactive and startlingly interactive. Buildings, structures and vehicles are fully destructible and soldiers break windows to enter buildings, hide behind fallen masonry and dive for trenches as if it were a miniature model of the actual battlefield. This level of realism makes for some uniquely reactive strategy – no battle ever goes the same way twice.

Consequently, retrying a campaign mission isn't a case of learning a strategy and going through the motions. Reacting to the environment and staying aware of every unit's position, capabilities and susceptibility to unexpected attack is essential, as is keeping an eye out for incidental opportunities – shooting bits off buildings so that they fall onto enemy troops, for instance, or spotting an enemy unit through the fog of war and sending your soldiers through the broken window of a nearby shed to set up an ambush.

The level of awareness and concentration needed to pull off the almost obsessively detailed micro-management in *Faces Of War* is formidable, but happily the game will do much to help the player cope. Earlier missions aren't anything like as desperately hard as some of those in *Soldiers* were, and the game will take you on a different path through the missions to keep the difficulty level consistent with your proficiency at miniature warfare. Although keeping track of troops can be challenging, the improved AI and fog of war alleviate the problems that *Soldiers* had (wherein troops would, on occasion, stand motionless to be slaughtered, never anything like as competent on their own as they were under direct player control).

Like *Supreme Commander*, *Faces Of War* looks set to do very exciting things for the real-time strategy genre which may experience a miniature renaissance in the near future. In a market quickly becoming fatigued with World War-themed shooters, *Faces Of War* stands out as an intricate and fresh RTS with a concept far from stale.

"THE BATTLEFIELDS ARE REALISTIC, REACTIVE AND STARTLINGLY INTERACTIVE"

KOMPUTER KONTROLLER

***Faces Of War*'s direct control feature adds to the game's action-RTS nature. As in *Soldiers: Heroes Of WWII*, players can take precise control of any unit. Thankfully, units now provide intelligent support for direct control, following the orders and actions of commanders. Sending in individual units on all-destroying rampages – as was popular in *Soldiers* – is now far less effective, and though player-controlled characters are inevitably much more effective than the AI as guerrilla attackers' squad-based operations are usually more successful.**

DETAILS

FORMAT: PC
ORIGIN: Ukraine
PUBLISHER: Ubisoft
DEVELOPER: Best Way
RELEASE: March (Japan/US: March '06)
GENRE: Real-Time Strategy
PLAYERS: 1-4 (1-4 Online)

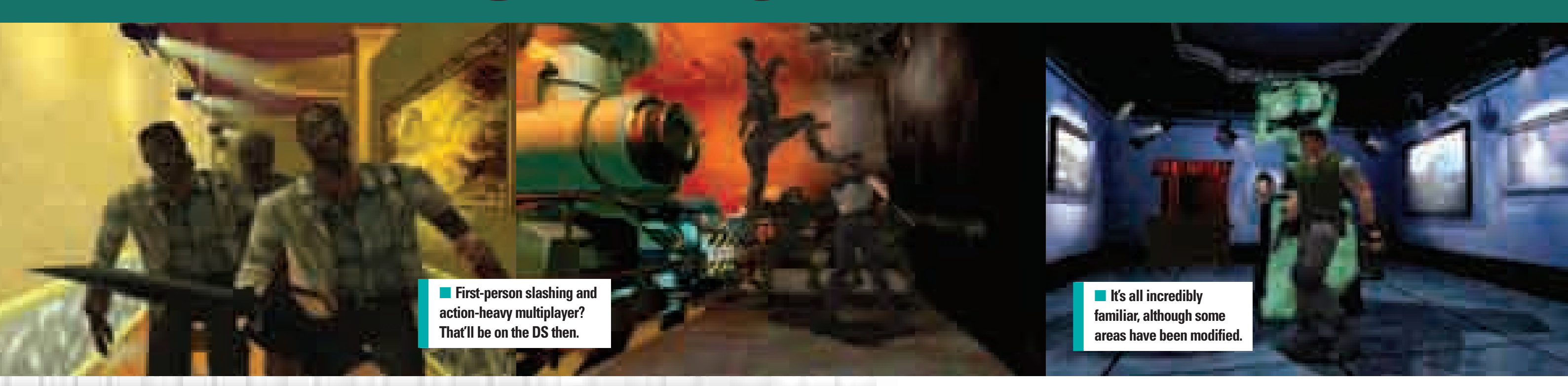
CONCEPT

An action-centred RTS aiming to bring war-obsessed gamers the same involving, cinematic experience as a WWII movie.



Making good use of the environment is the only real key to victory here, soldier.

RESIDENT EVIL: DEADLY SILENCE



First-person slashing and action-heavy multiplayer? That'll be on the DS then.

It's all incredibly familiar, although some areas have been modified.

"JILL! DON'T OPEN…THAT DOOR!"

With the advances that the *Resident Evil* series has made through its many incarnations, it might seem odd that Capcom has taken the series back in time on the DS. *Deadly Silence* is, after all, a virtually perfect recreation of the original PSone game that appeared ten years ago – and by perfect, we mean right down to the awful voice acting ('Master of Unlocking' comments included) and the opening FMV featuring Barry 'look at my fake beard' Burton. Not that that's a bad thing, of course, in fact, experiencing such things on Nintendo's handheld actually arouses pangs of nostalgia, and a few smiles along the way, although those not familiar with the original game may feel differently.

However, we can reassure anyone who doubts Capcom's work that this trip down memory lane works rather well on the DS. Visually, while not as advanced as the likes of *Resident Evil 4*, this fits the handheld to a tee and shows the blood-soaked action off nicely, while the controls have been tightened to encapsulate later *Resident Evil* additions such as quick turning, plus buttons dedicated to reloading and knife use. The big changes, however, come through Capcom's application of the DS itself. Many of the game's puzzles have been altered to take advantage of the handheld's capabilities (such as having to resuscitate a comrade with the touch screen and microphone after you find him mauled by snakes) while a new first-person knife-fighting element – using the touch screen to 'slash' attackers – has also been added randomly throughout the game. Unsurprisingly, the game's producer Minoru Nakai suggests this will add more action to the overall experience. Personally, we feel it might break the tension slightly in places where creepy silence is more preferable to a pack of zombies lunging at you, but the 'element of surprise' effect still works for the most part.

This emphasis on concentrating the action extends to the new multiplayer modes that, whether you play co-operatively or against friends, aren't much more than zombie-strewn races to escape key areas of the game. That's not to say they're not fun or strategic, of course – although it's not *Resident Evil* in the truest sense of the series – but then, Capcom should be commended for trying something else. Indeed, *Deadly Silence* is proof that Capcom is one of the few developers (outside Nintendo's inner circle) willing to push the DS – perhaps if more western developers tried the same, we'd all be better off.

"A PERFECT RECREATION OF THE ORIGINAL PSONE GAME, RIGHT DOWN TO THE AWFUL VOICE ACTING"

DETAILS

FORMAT: Nintendo DS
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Capcom
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: Q1 '06 (Japan: Out Now)
GENRE: Action Adventure
PLAYERS: 1 (2-4 Wi-Fi)

CONCEPT

Reborn again, in its original PSone form on Nintendo's handheld with a few tweaks and additions.



You versus the Tyrant… and you're using a knife. Right. Not looking to stay alive, Chris?


eMag



"WE MAY HAVE MADE A MISTAKE. YOU MAY HAVE WANTED TO SEE A HOLLYWOOD STAR"

YOSHINORI ONO, PRODUCER, CAPCOM

ONIMUSHA: DAWN OF DREAMS

FOUR OUT OF THREE AIN'T BAD

Last time we checked, there were three games to a trilogy. We're pretty sure this isn't just us. It could well be a fact. The more cynical among us may feel that any further titles are simply a way of cashing in on the popularity of a franchise, but in the case of *Dawn Of Dreams*, the fourth *Onimusha* title, we're quickly assured that this isn't the case and that this one is 'something different'.

"The short story is that I used to play games when I was a kid, but when I got into senior high I started to get interested in the girls, so I started to play musical instruments to impress them." Yoshinori Ono, producer of *Dawn Of Dreams* tells us. Ono is exhibit one. The actual trilogy was produced by Keiji Inafune, and what a fine job he did too; were it not for the need for new flavour, we'd probably be talking to him right now.

Still, we're not complaining. "Once I moved into college I went back to games," Ono continues. "I took an exam and was accepted into Capcom – I've been with them for 13 years now. I actually came in as a sound creator on games like the *Street Fighter Zero* and *Mega Man* series, but I became a sound producer when *Onimusha* and *Onimusha 2* arrived, and now I've been moved to producer on this latest title."

Ono knows the material, has seen the series develop every step of the way, and seems determined to improve upon the formula. What we have to question, though, is 'how'? The answer is immediately obvious: two playable characters on screen at any one time. Aside from the extra switching, combo and gameplay features this will produce, it also leaves the door open for a possible multiplayer adventure. "Ahhh. In regular Story mode you can't use two characters at the same time," Ono tells us. The fact that Ono had just produced a rather large 'ahhh' suggests that we may have touched upon something interesting. Obvious, but interesting. We instantly press him to reveal whether a mode where you can play with a friend exists. "You may be right," he grins knowingly. "But I don't want to betray your expectations. Let's just say you could have taken another controller downstairs with you when you played the game." Hardly cryptic, but we're pleased to hear that the opportunity hasn't been missed. *Dawn Of Dreams* really lends itself to multiplayer possibilities and we can't wait to start



DETAILS

FORMAT: PlayStation2
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Capcom
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: 17 March
GENRE: Action
PLAYERS: 1

COMMENT

■ Take control of five brand-new characters and use their individual attributes to save ancient Japan once again, using a host of new abilities and combat features.



HISTORY

■ The *Onimusha* series has impressed action fans every step of the way with its impressive combat system and varied environments. The series has seen everything from time travel through to Hollywood talent signing up to get their face involved.

SKILLS GET

As well as the many weapons and powers that are available to the warriors, each will have their own special ability that you can use to reveal further secrets and magical items. For instance, Roberto has the strength to move large objects that block your way, so if you remember where you saw the moveable objects, you can return to the area once you've met up with Roberto and clear the route to a new area. It's a simple but effective way of providing an element of exploration to an otherwise linear affair, and with each character having a different way to help, you may also need to use a little brainpower.



DEVELOPER PROFILE

It's been a roller coaster ride for Capcom over the last couple of years, but despite the odd slip-up its studios have managed to create some of the finest videogames we've seen in all that time. Better still, this quality is looking set to continue with *Onimusha: Dawn Of Dreams*.

HISTORY

- **KILLER7** 2005 [Multi]
- **DEVIL MAY CRY 2** 2003 [PlayStation2]
- **VIEWTIFUL JOE** 2003 [Multi]

MIXING IT UP

A key difference between *Dawn Of Dreams* and the previous *Onimusha* titles is the number of characters that will be available to you. Whereas previously two was the most you had to play with, *Dawn Of Dreams* boasts five very different characters for you to try your hand at.

SOKI

Soki is your classic samurai character, and fans of the series should be used to this style. Hard-hitting and with easy-to-master combos, if you're going to be charging head-first into a battle then he's a good character to be doing it with.

OHATSU

For those who loved the gun fighting in *Onimusha 2*, you now have the lovely Ohatsu to play with. Armed with a lot of guns and modern weaponry (including some rather useful droids) she's certainly a girl you'll want to make use of.

COMBINE AND CONQUER

Although we've been told that it's probably something that won't appeal to experienced players, a new element of the game will be the ability to combine some of the items that you find to create new items that you can use or sell in the shop. This has been put in place to aid those who are finding leveling up difficult, and will provide these players with extra cash with which to purchase skills rather than earning them the hard way. The tracking down of these items, although simple enough, will take time, so you're still going to have to put some work in.



in pairs. This is a big step for the *Onimusha* franchise, and the first feature that really shows that they're trying desperately to separate this title from the first three games that formed the trilogy. Well, that and the fact that *Dawn Of Dreams* is surprisingly void of famous faces. "Before we decided to overhaul the gameplay we had some famous people in mind, including some big Hollywood names," Ono admits. "But we really wanted to work on the gameplay. Also, if we were to do that we would have had to call this game Onimusha 3.1 or 3.5. This was one of the main reasons we decided against it. It may have been a mistake. You may have wanted to see a Hollywood star."

To be honest, we really don't mind. If the price we pay for not having overpaid Hollywood talent contained within the title is having a honed combo system put in place and a host of new gameplay features, then we couldn't be more willing to make the trade. In fact, it's only when these new features are looked at carefully, that you realise how different this title is from what we've seen before. Ono has

> "IF YOU'VE PLAYED THE OTHER GAMES, YOU'LL KNOW THAT THIS IS SOMETHING SPECIAL"
> YOSHINORI ONO, PRODUCER, CAPCOM

certainly made a few changes, but whether they're for better or worse remains to be seen. "Obviously, because of my job I have to play a lot of games," he tells us. "Many of them I really enjoy, but what I experience sometimes is that a game will be really good in many parts, but far too hard to get into – far too complicated. So I thought, especially for the newcomers to *Onimusha*, Puzzle Boxes shouldn't be breakable and the controls should be made simpler. Having said that, there's so much more to it that hardcore players will certainly have plenty to work on."

This is an unusual move for Capcom. Normally the titles that have its logo stamped upon them are extremely difficult and this is probably the first time we've seen any form of weakness from the company. We mean, Puzzle Boxes that can't be broken? This was one of the

ROBERTO

Favouring his fists over fancy weaponry, Roberto is on a mission of pure revenge. This style is a first for the series so Roberto's uses are going to be very interesting. Thankfully, it's an area in which Capcom has much experience.

JUBEI

Speedy and lethal with a sword, Jubei is your ninja character. She may only be 14 years old, but considering she's the granddaughter of the famed Jubei Yagu from *Onimusha 2*, that shouldn't be too much of a problem.

TENKAI

Do you recognise that armour? With staff in hand, the mysterious monk Tenkai can perform feats of magic – such as turning enemies to your cause – as well as holding his own when in the thick of it.



COMBAT PROFILE

Beating a never-ending mass of enemies to a pulp is what makes many games appealing. Plenty have tried to do it well, but few manage to create anything more than a horrid button-mash-fest. Fortunately, Capcom has experience in both 2D and 3D combat, and is responsible for some of the best fighting experiences available.

HISTORY

- **DEVIL MAY CRY** 2005 [PlayStation2]
- **VIEWTIFUL JOE** 2005 [GameCube]
- **STREET FIGHTER 3** 2000 [Dreamcast]

The *Onimusha* games are famed for their intense battles. *Dawn Of Dreams* is sure not to let us down.

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

STARLESS WONDER

ONIMUSHA 3 × COMBAT – HOLLYWOOD = ONIMUSHA: DAWN OF DREAMS

key areas that separated the good players from the great ones in previous titles, but now it seems that no matter what you do, you can still walk away with the items inside. "Those bloody boxes," Ono fumes. "I hated them. You can still open them with skill, but if you fail you now have the option to appraise the box and get what's inside. It costs a lot of money, though, and you might only get a herb or something, so it's quite a risk. At least lesser players won't miss out on items."

We can appreciate this. After all, we find ourselves in a time where accessibility is as important as gameplay. Videogames are becoming more and more popular, and you can't expect everyone to be up to speed straight away. "We've also got a system that lets enemies adjust to your performance," Ono continues. "If you are very good at it, AI will be adjusted automatically and you will get more aggressive enemies. If you're not very good they will give you a little bit of a break."

"I USED TO PLAY GAMES WHEN I WAS A KID, BUT WHEN I GOT INTO SENIOR HIGH I STARTED TO GET INTERESTED IN GIRLS"
YOSHINORI ONO, PRODUCER, CAPCOM

It all sounds interesting and it looks as a far more accessible arm to the franchise is on the way. Of course, this will only aid Capcom in its attempt to separate this new title from the trilogy, and with it still boasting the same good looks and nicely implemented combo system, we could be about to witness the most successful instalment yet.

■ Each character will have their own unique ways of disposing of the enemy hordes.

■ Juggling, countering, swapping characters It's all so very Capcom. We certainly won't be complaining.

SHOWCASE

MORE THINGS TO WATCH FOR ON THE GAMING HORIZON

ASTONISHIA STORY

SAME OLD STORY

Format: PlayStation Portable
Origin: Japan
Publisher: Ubisoft
Developer: Sonnori Corporation
Genre: RPG
Players: TBA



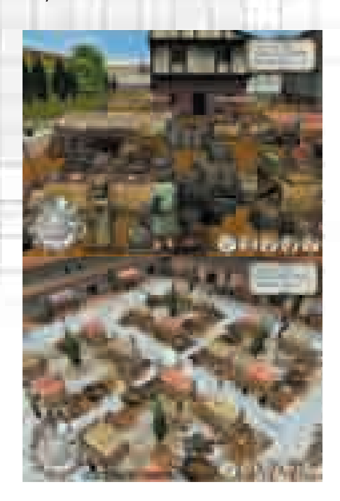
After many months without any new Japanese role-playing titles, suddenly a veritable deluge is set to hit the PlayStation Portable in the coming months. Joining the likes of *PoPoLoCrois* and *Tales Of Eternia* is *Astonishia Story*, firmly in the old-school RPG mould and hailing from the land of the MMO, South Korea. On the face of it, the story seems your fairly typical fare – you, the player, take on the role of a noble royal knight, and are tasked with the recapturing of a long lost relic. *Astonishia Story* doesn't appear to be anything particularly innovative or ground breaking so far, but we have no doubt that the RPG fanatics of this world will lap it up when it's released a little later on this year.

RELEASE: TBC '06

HEART OF EMPIRE: ROME

INFAMY, INFAMY…THEY'VE ALL GOT IT INFAMY

Format: PC
Origin: UK
Publisher: Deep Silver
Developer: Deep Red
Genre: Strategy
Players: 1



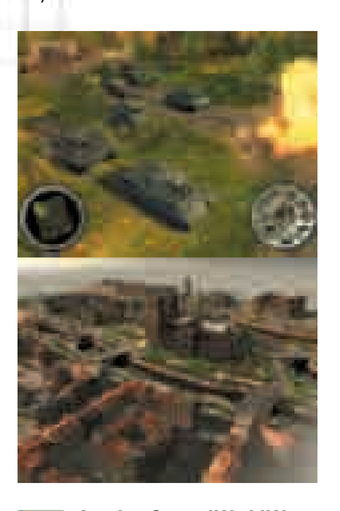
Milton Keynes-based developer Deep Red Games is hard at work on two titles simultaneously: the soon to be released *Tycoon City: New York* and this game, the very ambitious *Heart Of Empire: Rome*. Allowing you to build and control your own vision of the Roman Empire, *Heart Of Empire: Rome* should be a very enjoyable game. As with *Tycoon City*, this is very much a social simulation, asking the player to manage individual Romans, *Sims* style, as well as overlooking the construction of the city. Deep Red's games have grown to become synonymous with quality over the last few years, and so *Heart Of Empire* should be nothing short of excellent. If you enjoy social simulation, that is.

RELEASE: TBC '06

RUSH FOR BERLIN

…OR YOU'LL MISS THE HOFF CONCERT

Format: PC
Origin: Hungary
Publisher: Deep Silver
Developer: Stormregion
Genre: RTS
Players: 1



Another Second World War game? Yes, we're sorry to say that's correct. Thankfully, though, this is not a first-person shooter. *Rush For Berlin* is the latest title vying for real-time strategy supremacy, boasting fully destructible buildings and landscapes as well as lovely looking graphics. It will also be possible to enter buildings and partake in indoor firefights, and with the advanced damage model allowing for structural damage, these battles should be constantly evolving as the surroundings alter. Whether this will be enough to tear RTS fans away from the upcoming *Company Of Heroes* or, indeed, encourage people to once again fight in the Second World War, we're not entirely sure.

RELEASE: Q1 '06

CITY LIFE

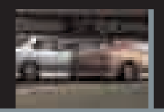
THE SIMS-SONS

Format: PC
Origin: France
Publisher: Deep Silver
Developer: Monte Cristo Games
Genre: Strategy
Players: 1 (Multiplayer TBA)



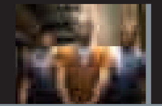
Combining the social development aspects of *The Sims* with the city-building features inherent in *Sim City*, *City Life* has the potential to appeal to a major audience when it arrives later down the line this year. Players will be able to craft a completely original and unique city in which every action they take will have a direct consequence on its citizens. Again, it does sound very similar to Deep Red's *Tycoon City: New York*, but being able to create an original metropolis does mean it differs sufficiently enough to warrant attention. If Monte Cristo Games can develop the social aspect of the title to compete with Deep Red's effort, then we could have a fascinating battle for city-building supremacy on our hands.

RELEASE: Q2 '06



DELAYED – Gran Turismo [PSP]

The portable version of Polyphony Digital's motorsports masterpiece has been put back until April. Initially pencilled in to make it for the end of 2005, PSP owners will have to hold out just a little longer.



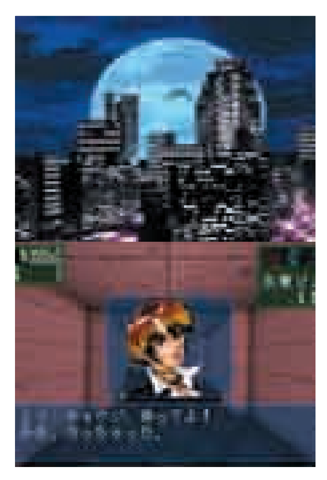
DELAYED – Splinter Cell Double Agent [PSP]

Sam's latest outing has toppled down the calendar back to September, possibly to allow the PlayStation Portable version room to breathe. Still, at his age, Mr Fisher could probably do with a bit of a rest.

SHIN MEGAMI TENSEI: DEVIL SUMMONER

ATLUS IS BACK

Format: PlayStation Portable
Origin: Japan
Publisher: Atlus
Developer: In-House
Genre: RPG
Players: 1



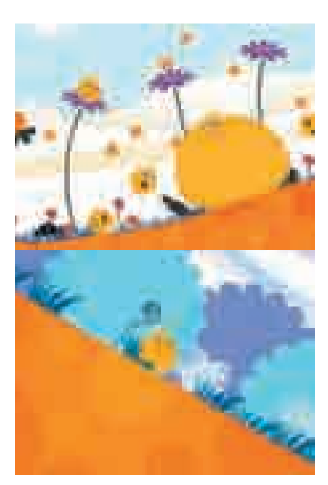
Those whose introduction to the *Shin Megami Tensei* universe was this year's *Lucifer's Call*, may be surprised to learn that the series has actually been around since the glory days of the NES. Previously, the series was only available to PAL gamers on import, so few may be aware that it's the anniversary of a spin off this year – *Devil Summoner*. Yes, it's been ten years since its first release on the Saturn, and now it's coming to Sony's portable machine. Atlus has concentrated on adding new content for the game – new bosses and a demonic compendium, for example, and so far *Devil Summoner* has been well received in its home nation of Japan. We await this one with baited breath.

RELEASE: TBA '06

LOCO ROCO

UN POCO LOCO EN LA CABEZA

Format: PlayStation Portable
Origin: Japan
Publisher: Sony
Developer: In-House
Genre: Platform Puzzle
Players: 1



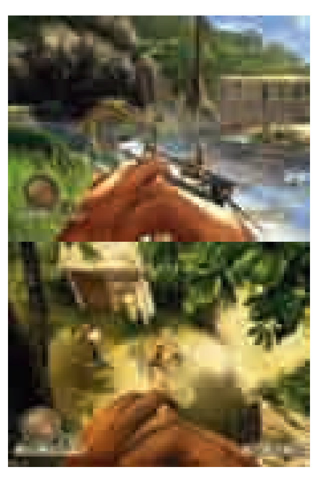
Now, this is more like it. Finally, here we have something that could quell the multitude of PSP naysayers fixated on the lack of originality on Sony's sleek, handheld masterpiece. *Loco Roco* is a bizarre and beautiful mixture of *Monkey Ball* and *Katamari Damacy*, together with the styling of *Yoshi's Story*. The game's essential premise has you rolling a large, gelatinous ball from one end of a level to the other, while munching on flowers along the way. It was never going to be that simple, though. No, there are myriad obstacles, platforms and enemies in your path, and using the shoulder buttons and your wits, it's completely up to you to avoid them. We want *Loco Roco*. We want it now.

RELEASE: TBA '06

FAR CRY INSTINCTS: PREDATOR

TOP OF THE FOOD CHAIN

Format: Xbox 360
Origin: US
Publisher: Ubisoft
Developer: In-House
Genre: Sports
Players: TBA



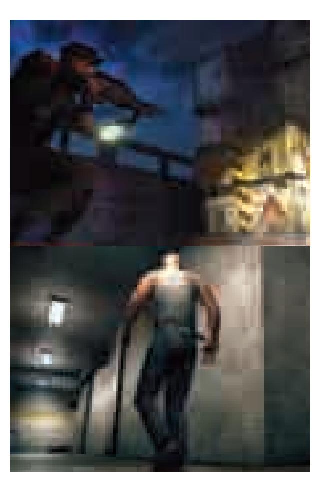
After the critical acclaim that the Xbox version of *Far Cry Instincts* received, Ubisoft has seen fit to port it over to the Xbox 360 along with the brand new mission pack imaginatively titled *Far Cry Instincts: Next Chapter*. Ubisoft is promising the obligatory enhancement of the game's already lush visuals, so expect to see jungle environments that make *Metal Gear Solid 3* pale in comparison. Provided that the focus of intense skirmishes together with tight enemy AI remains, *Far Cry Instincts: Predator* should be very well received, especially after the disappointment that was *Perfect Dark Zero*. Hopefully, the thoroughly diverting Live modes of the original will endure in *Far Cry*'s latest guise.

RELEASE: TBA

SPLINTER CELL ESSENTIALS

FISHER PRICE

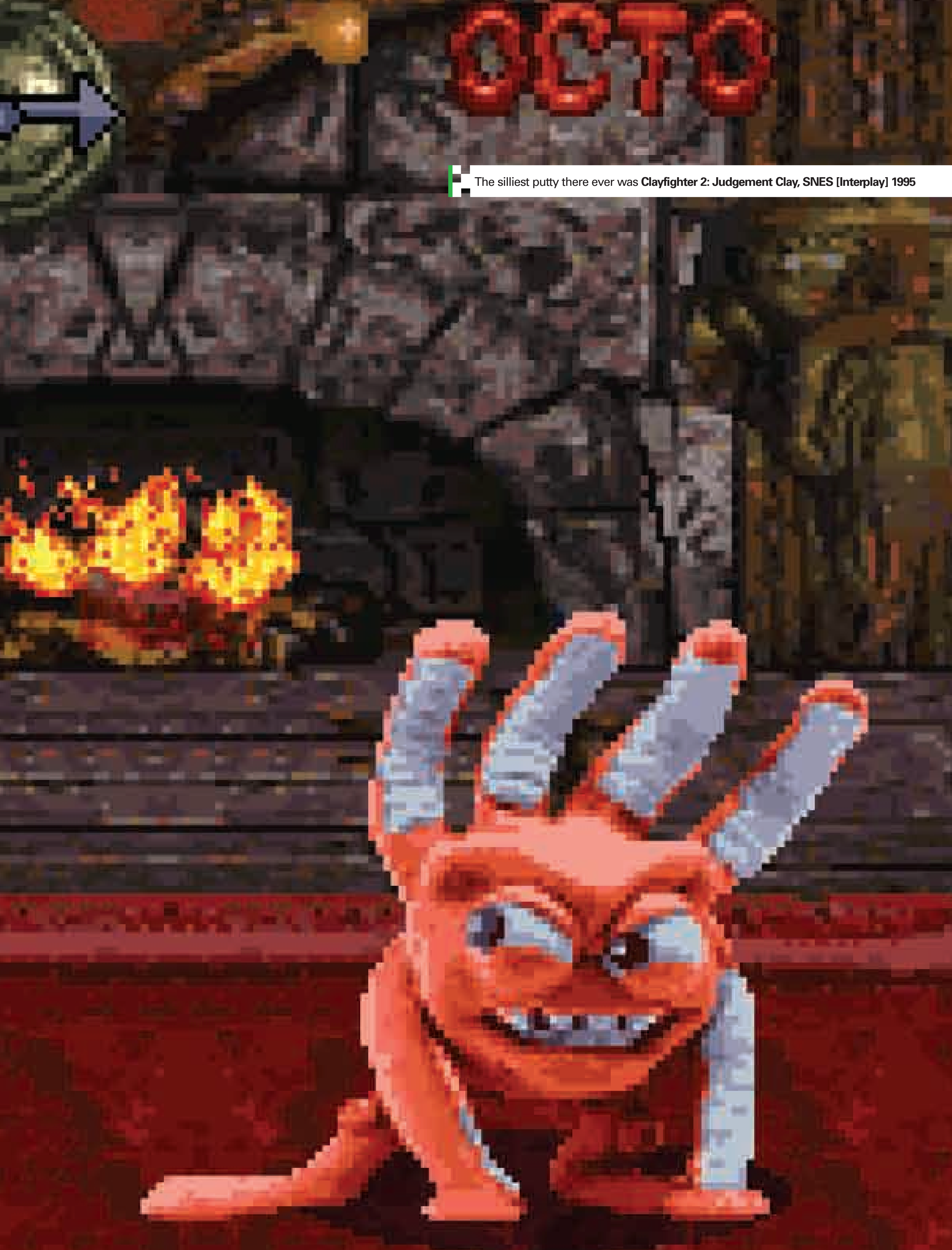
Format: PlayStation Portable
Origin: US
Publisher: Ubisoft
Developer: In-House
Genre: Action
Players: 1-2



The second generation of PlayStation Portable software is really beginning to demonstrate the machine's power. Sam Fisher's debut on the console looks set to go even further, capturing all the graphical splendour for which the *Splinter Cell* franchise is renowned. *Essentials* is really another 'best of', offering portable owners the chance to sneak through the greatest missions of Sam's 'career', including some from the forthcoming *Double Agent*. Our only concern is one that continues to blight the PlayStation Portable: the distinct lack of buttons. *Splinter Cell* has always worked on a convoluted control system, so how Ubisoft manages to translate this to the PSP will be crucial to its success.

RELEASE: Q2 '06


BLOB



The silliest putty there ever was **Clayfighter 2: Judgement Clay, SNES [Interplay] 1995**



arg!

The fascination and frustration of alternate reality gaming



Treading the line between truth and fiction – and often blurring it – alternate reality gaming is elusive to define. games™ went in search of some answers…

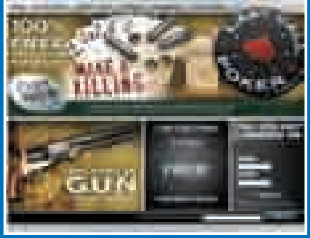
It's midday on 19 November and games™ is at the Hollywood Forever Cemetery in Los Angeles. We're not here to pay tribute to a lost loved one or a departed celebrity – although dropping flowers on a grave to mark respect is a necessity, says our host – and we're not here to morbidly ogle mourners. Instead, we and a hundred or so other people are here to play cards as part of an ARG called *Last Call Poker*.

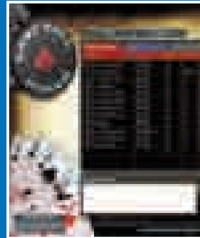
Standing for Alternate Reality Game, an ARG is something incorporating massively multiplayer online gaming, text adventures and pure literature – but never sitting in just one of those camps. Think along the line of live role-playing, where military or fantasy aficionados re-enact battles, but with sleuthing. And with less emphasis on costumes. Usually.

Some readers will have heard of ARGs before; most will be thinking back to the end of 2004, when the hype machine for *Halo 2* kicked into gear and the first trailer linked to ilovebees.com. Centring on a blog warning against imminent alien invasion, *I Love Bees*' alternate reality story paralleled the game's plot, but veered off when it stepped beyond mere back-story and asked readers to decipher clues buried



Yes, so gathering a horde of journalists and other media types in one place and giving us presents seems gimmicky, but then, that's all part of the ARG appeal.





As ARGs go, *Last Call Poker* is rather more obvious in its intentions.





"The game is insisting that it isn't a game, and you start to believe that the game isn't lying to you – it just sent you an email with a recording of your voice attached"

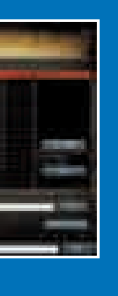
buried in web-page language HTML, waiting for pay-phones to ring with pre-recorded messages. It got gamers involved on a massive scale, with a countdown date that fuelled fanboys to the point of over excitement.

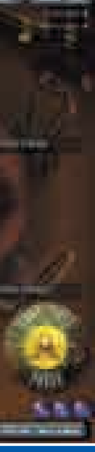
ARGs didn't start with *Halo* however. Before *I Love Bees*, was *The Beast*, a puzzle game promoting Spielberg's movie *AI* which used coded messages also buried in websites and emails, phone calls and live events to engage an audience of investigators. I's not just entertainment companies that have funded ARGs either – Audi's *The Art Of The Heist* used live events to promote a new vehicle. And *Last Call Poker*? Well, that's something put together by Activision to promote the game *Gun*.

But as we stand alongside the other attendees in the cemetery, we can't help but wonder…Why on earth would anyone want to play an ARG when there are so many great, well, 'normal' games out there? And when most of the bigger alternate reality experiences are backed by a multinational hoping to score kudos for an upcoming product, aren't gamers being manipulated by the bean counters? In short: what's the point?

Jonathan Waite, an editor at argn.com, the foremost site for alternate reality gaming, says ARGs are, "a unique gaming experience that draw a player directly into the world in which the game exists." What he says sets this apart from, say, *World Of Warcraft* are interactive real-world elements (often involving phone calls or live events) and, Waite stresses, "a well-developed story and interesting characters to enhance the experience." He says it has allure by exploiting its position as fiction posing as fact: "The game is insisting that it isn't a game, and you are starting to believe that maybe the game isn't lying to you any more, because it just sent you an email with a recording of the message you left on the voicemail of that mystery phone number."

Andy Aiken, a computer science research student at the University of Aberdeen, who took part in *The Beast* before starting independent ARGs *Lockjaw* and *Mu*, says it's something different: "In brief, it's a form of interactive storytelling. Unfiction is another good term for the genre – fiction







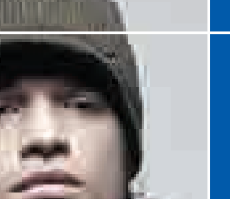


posing as fact." (Unfiction is also the name of the popular forums over at Waite's argn.com.) Aiken postulates that ARGs, "aren't games," despite the g-word being in their very name. He points out that, "they rarely involve winning or losing." Indeed, the aim is usually to successfully navigate through by discussing puzzles and clues with other players on internet forums.

And it's this that we find both fascinating and frustrating about alternate reality games. This is a kind of gaming that likes to remain undefined, and is happy to pull the wool over the eyes of outside observers. It also makes it difficult to pin down some people to talk about it. At times, the more high-profile organisers of ARGs refuse to be interviewed as it might ruin the mystery they're perpetuating.

But aren't those same organisers moneymen simply trying to enslave the attentions of discerning consumers in a highbrow manner? *I Love Bees, The Art Of The Heist, The Beast* – these games scored column inches in national papers, but only because they had the backing of multinationals. "Who cares, if it's a good game?" argues Aiken. "I suppose you could compare it to product placement in movies. If you're enjoying the film enough, does it frustrate you that Bond's driving a particular model of car, or does it add to your experience?" Waite is less tolerant of the accusation: "If you enjoy watching a television commercial because it's funny and enjoyable to watch, does that make you a pawn to the company that is promoting the product? It's often the opposite, where players will appreciate the brand more because the company took the bold step to create something worthwhile and wonderful to get involved in." Though two ARGs have sprung up in the UK that buck the trend of acting as a promotional tool.

The first of these is *Perplex City*. Gamers wishing to take part can buy packs of Pokémon-esque puzzle cards, like Top Trumps but for the Su DoKu age, and read blogs and emailed journals. By solving the puzzles printed on each card, piecing together the map printed on the reverse of each and reading various web diaries, gamers are led on a treasure hunt to find a cube worth £100,000 located somewhere on the planet. *Perplex City* hasn't been without its criticism from ARG purists, though. "The cards have been controversial among players because they saw it as pay for play," admits Adrian Hon, lead designer for the cards at Mind Candy Games. But as the man in charge of the puzzle cards, he argues, "We need to be able to fund the game, secure the prize fund and do the one thing no one else



Jamie Kane... and Jamie Kan't

The BBC's attempt to bring ARGs to a young audience should be applauded. It marks a concerted effort to take the interactive medium out to the masses via licence fee-funded means. However, the creativity of this endeavour leaves often undermines the masterstrokes.

The puzzles are tame Flash games. There's a ridiculous moment on the second day that has you enhancing a photo to find details that aren't there – the kind of nonsense that gets peddled to TV audiences but has most computer-literate people up in arms.

Cleverly, one plot point involves a character that turns out to be another using a fake ID on a web forum, but conversely one of the main secondary characters is Greta, a computer hacker that can't spell. In fact, such attempts to be clever about modern literacy depresses greatly, and when the language tries too hard to be realistic it stoops to levels of cringe-inducing txt-spk: "This is like sumthin on murder she Writes." (Seriously – we cut and pasted that) *Jamie Kane* creates a decent voice for secondary characters, and the circular arguments and backbiting on message boards in the game will probably be familiar to many web-savvy gamers, but while fake l33t-speak is one thing, making grave mistakes in understanding the true level of literacy among those with blogs is another mis-step entirely.s



"These games thrive on players exchanging details and talking plot – there's more written about these games on the internet than there is actually written for them"

has – make an ARG profitable. The cards are also a useful way to get the game out there. They've helped us get people who don't normally go in for this kind of thing. Plus, we know more committed players have sent their cards on to friends as well."

And it's this that taps into the one truth that's at the core of the alternate reality gaming scene (it's also the one thing that's needed to make something a 'scene'): community. These sorts of games thrive on players exchanging details and talking plot – there's more written about these games than there is written for them. "Community discussion is one of the most important elements of the genre," confirms Aiken. "You tend to discuss and speculate on the plot as a group."

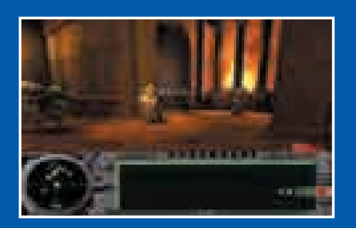
Such a close-knit world is something Hon knows exists all too well. He started out as a player of *The Beast,* responsible for an extensive walkthrough which made a name for him among fellow players. When Mind Candy founder Michael Smith Googled for ARGs, he found Hon and invited him to join the company full time. In the ARG world, the power forever rests with the players who can just as easily be either a puppet master (ARG lingo for the people in charge) or a puppet, being strung along by the story.

Which differs greatly from the BBC's efforts, *Jamie Kane,* a single-player ARG that takes the genre's hallmarks – the community aspects and puzzle solving – and turns them into something resembling a 'normal' game. Playing as the fan of a Robbie Williams-like pop star, players are sent emails and read message board posts from other characters, and have to solve puzzles. Yet all the participants except the player are automatons. The 50-odd emails you get sent come from the BBC's email server; instant messaging conversations are with chatbots; you can read forums but not post; and all the puzzles are tame-as-you-like Flash games (some glaringly terrible, see 'Jamie Kane And Jamie Kan't'). But, despite it's Lo-Fi result, *Kane* takes the

Boundary Blurring

Marathon

Before *Halo* was *Marathon,* another Bungie-made sci-fi shooter. Differing from *Halo,* but prefiguring *I Love Bees,* was the backstory as arduous and lengthy as the title could suggest? It pushed the boundaries of storytelling through games via a fractured narrative and clues hidden throughout the game world and even the game's manual. At http://marathon.bungie.org/story/ they are still piecing together the story, which draws from topics including numerology, Shakespeare, the Bible, ancient mythology and mathematics.



killer7

Fittingly, a game that is essentially about schizophrenia and multiple personalities trying to deal with looming nuclear war has a story just as murky as the game is to sum up in a sentence. Although the basic set-up is a a relatively simple on-rails shooter, the sophisticated dialogue and continued hints of backstory from hints and references made by the ethereal supporting cast (the red-suited gimp has to be one of our favourites…) make *killer7* a very ARG-like experience – albeit a supremely linear and tricky one.



Lost

For *Lost,* production studio Bad Robot isn't happy to tell two stories – the lives of the castaways living on the mysterious island, with continued flashbacks to their respective pasts – they tease dedicated viewers with a third strand. Fake websites for doomed airline services and restaurant chains have sprung up with hints about the origin of the show's mysterious island. Its reality-blurring peak will be the release of a tie-in novel that doesn't chronicle the show but is 'written' by one of the characters.

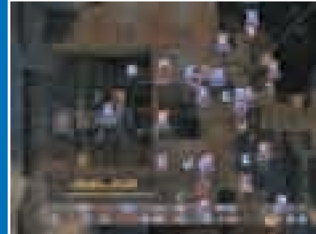


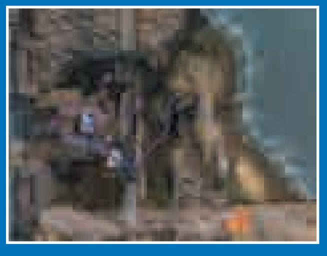
Uplink

This indie hit is all about hacking software, but it pulls the wool over your eyes regularly, including a moment where the game 'dials' into the hacking server, complete with requisite modem sounds. Some paranoid players have reported even yanking out their telephone cable from the wall in fear of the game dialling into a 'real' illicit server, so convincing was the recreation. The use of basic network phrases helped blur the line between what was happening inside the game and outside of it.







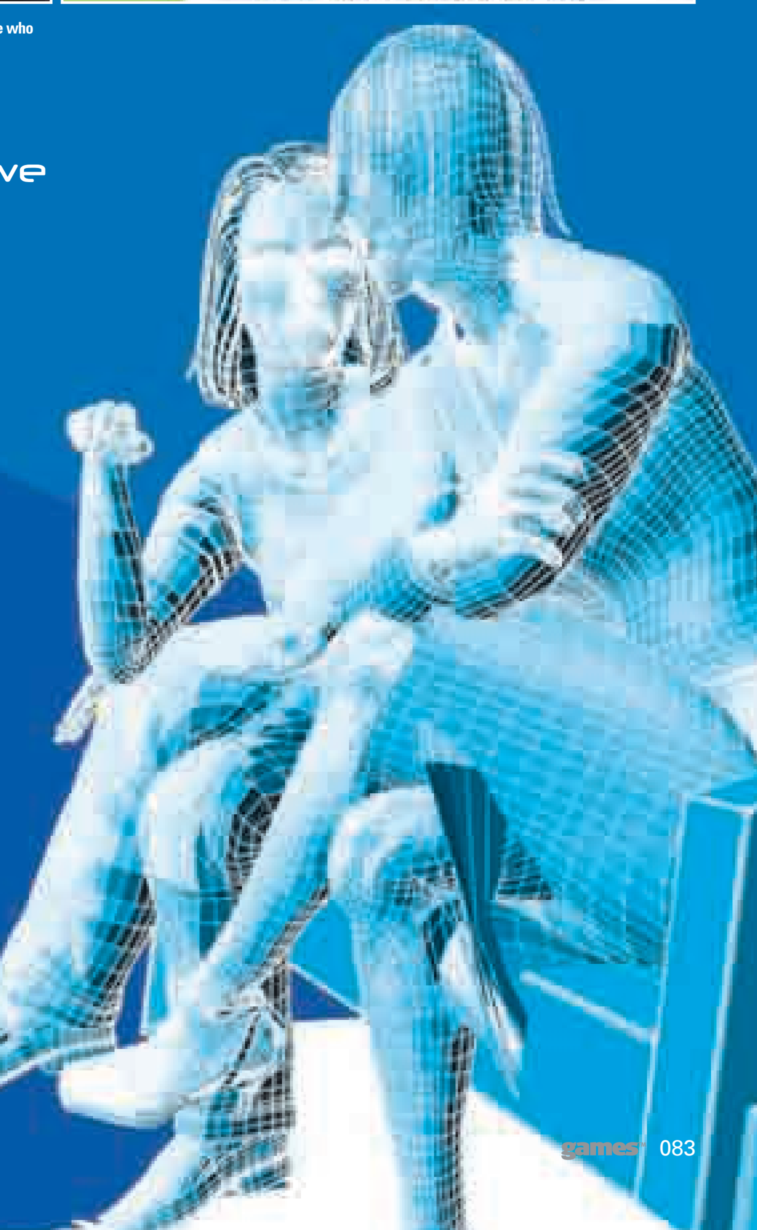


Map layouts for *Halo 2*, cunningly hidden within a layered website – gamers went mad for it.



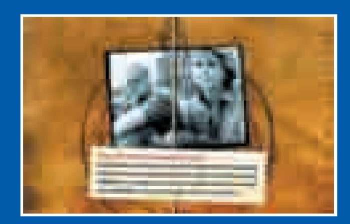
Microsoft's work with its *Halo 2* build-up, specifically through the I Love Bees website, confounded many people who had never experienced an ARG before – the company has since used similar approaches with the 360 launch.

"To define alternate reality gaming in the same way that we catagorise other games would be foolish – it stands as a unique entity all on its own"



In Memoriam

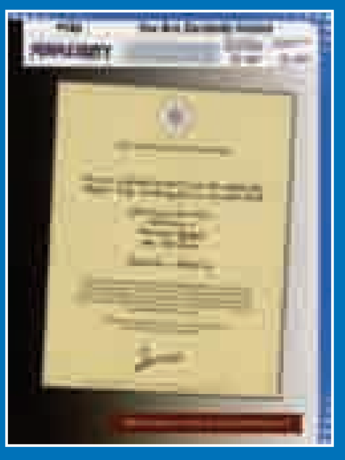
Frenchman Eric Viennot's mystery game used video footage on its CD and real websites and emails to tell (and help you solve) the possible murder of two journalists. This remains one of the real unheralded gems of recent games, requiring minimal specs and any home computer (PC or Mac) to run it. The only thing spoiling its budget price is that an internet search for the terms found in the game often leads you to a FAQ guide rather than the intentionally planted clues you're supposed to find like electronic breadcrumbs.

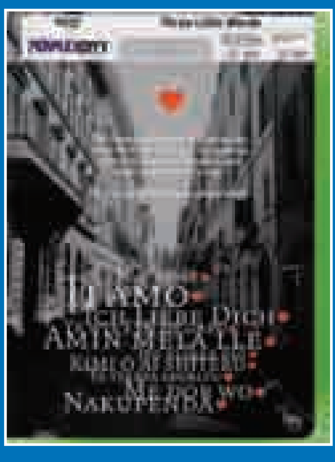


House Of Leaves

So sprawling and wonderfully layered is this two-inch-thick paperback that part of the narrative – which leaps from screenplay to prose to diary entry like a child hopped up on sugar leaping from leg to leg – is printed backwards, and explicitly asks the reader to fetch a mirror so they can read it. This is the kind of thing ARG writers should aspire to – maybe they should focus on getting a publishing deal rather than worrying about intentionally confusing clues and puzzles.







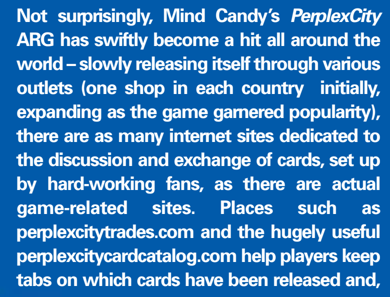




Perplex City cards range in colour from red, orange and yellow all the way up to purple, black and even silver – the higher the colour is up the ladder, the harder it is to solve the puzzle. Believe us, those silvers aren't easy.

Lost And Found

Not surprisingly, Mind Candy's *PerplexCity* ARG has swiftly become a hit all around the world – slowly releasing itself through various outlets (one shop in each country initially, expanding as the game garnered popularity), there are as many internet sites dedicated to the discussion and exchange of cards, set up by hard-working fans, as there are actual game-related sites. Places such as perplexcitytrades.com and the hugely useful perplexcitycardcatalog.com help players keep tabs on which cards have been released and, more importantly, which ones are up for grabs elsewhere; with no Panini-style option for buying cards that you're missing seperately, online trading has swiftly become the norm for those unwilling to buy multiple packs looking for a single card. Of course, some people have even started revealing the answers to each card (somewhat unfairly, we might add) but then, without an actual card to enter the code from, such answers are rather useless. Looks like you'll need to stump up some cash after all.

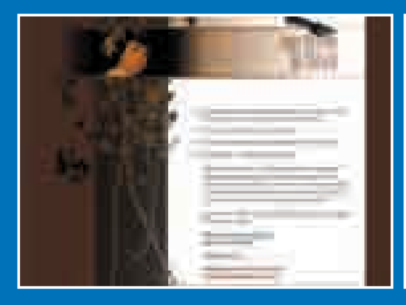


"It's really about the story, but the gaming element gives you the motivation to get to the end of it. It's more complex than a novel"

ARG world to its sophisticated conclusion: everything's fake, even the other participants, but drawn with enough detail to not be.

"It's all about the story," says Rob Cooper, the BBC's producer of interactive drama and entertainment, pointing out that author Matt Beaumont has been key in writing much of the project. "The games element gives you reason to get to the end of the story." But if that's the case, then why aren't alternate reality games simply published as a serialised novel online?

At the BBC, Cooper says that *Kane* is an attempt to catch the attentions of younger audiences already being fought over by wider, more mainstream things – *The X-Factor*, *T4*, *Heat*. Cooper says that young audiences are so familiar with gaming that to ignore them as a device to get them reading would be a mistake. According to the BBC's research, every single 16 year old



Many advertising agencies have jumped onto the ARG bandwagon, turning simple promotions for various products into complex stories that have kept people entertained for hours. Whether it makes them buy, however, is another matter.





in the country spends at least 20 minutes every day playing some kind of game, be that a console title or a casual game online, via interactive TV or on a mobile phone. "Another great turn-off is that the skill-set needed for Xbox and the like is often quite enhanced."

Everyone we spoke to is agreed that this is the ARG genre's biggest advantage over other games; they can be used to reach players other than the usual crowd chased by traditional videogames publishers and their safe TV ads that often assume that gamers are either children or late-night TV-trawling loners. So we turned to this seemingly vast body of players – everymen, the puppet masters would have you believe – to see if this was true.

"I play these games because I feel involved," stresses Sandra, a programming advisor based near New York. In her 30s, Sandra says she doesn't play many recent games, but used to love adventure games and has dabbled in strategy and RPGs.

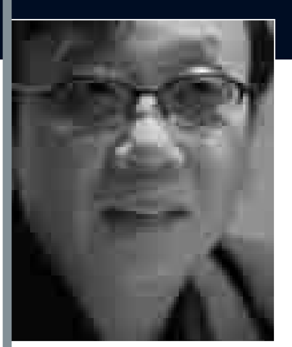
Mark, a 20-something student from the south of England, adds: "To be honest, I read about them rather than play them, although I've bought some *Perplex City* cards. I enjoy watching something jump from web post to email to journal to phone call. I've never read books like it, and obviously no television show or film has dared be so complex." Mark explains that a real highlight for him has been the *I Love Bees* audio files, which can be re-assembled into a five-hour long radio play. He's never played *Halo*.

The patterns repeat themselves in other testimonies – cast your eyes across the Unfiction forums and you'll see thousands of posts and ruminations all chasing the truth at the end of a fiction rainbow. It confuses as much as it clarifies, however. Don't these people want to play a real game? Or read a real book?

Aiken – who has spent a long time analysing how these ARGs are made – says, "Isn't that a little like saying 'We have *Heat* magazine now; why bother with books?'. They're a different medium, I suppose, or at least a different way of using the medium. Or – and I'm deliberately being facetious now – you could say 'We've had *Wolfenstein*, no need to bother making any more first-person shooters.'"

He's right, but the very nature of an ARG – a story posing as a game posing as fact – is the genre's final contradiction in our investigation. This is a sub-genre of gaming without boundaries, even though it can be pretty much summed up as interactive fiction. But it's also so slight that it falls between the cracks of definition. It isn't backed by any major companies to make it a commercial entity, although its most high-profile successes are those designed as marketing exercises. Its proponents say it isn't a game, but do say that it tells stories better than anything you can get for a PlayStation. It gives with one hand, and misdirects with the other – but all the players assert that they are fulfilled.

Back in Los Angeles, time's running out on the poker meet – we've been given a pack of promotional cards, but little to no mention has been made of *Gun*, least of all by the performers trying to maintain the whole façade. On the one hand, this day of make-believe has been a lot of fun; it's easy to see how ARGs can be so compelling. A guy standing with us says, really, it's just a bit of fun. He's right. Someone else, argues that they place you at the centre of the action and grant human closeness and contact with other players, beyond what most other games can give you. She's right too. But on the other hand, when everyone goes home, the organisers take off their masks and the marketing men ask how many people turned up and whether they were talking about the game being promoted rather than the alternate reality game being hosted, we can't help but wonder if we haven't been played a little.



The Players

BEING RESPONSIBLE FOR KIDS MISSING SCHOOL AND A POPULATION THAT SIMPLY CAN'T GET ENOUGH SLIME MERCHANDISE IS QUITE A FEAT. WE SPEAK TO YUJI HORII TO FIND OUT WHAT MAKES HIS IDEAS SO SPECIAL…

YUJI HORII

ARMOR PROJECT

The *Dragon Quest* series is something of a big deal. Rumours that new instalments can only be released on weekends in Japan to prevent school children truanting, and with the games selling, in total, somewhere in the region of 40 million in Japan alone all point to one thing – creator Yuji Horii is something of a genius. We try to tell him this, but he won't listen.

It turns out that Horii isn't a man to take all of the credit himself. He's keen to talk about the colleagues that have been with him every step of the way. The team members that work on *Dragon Quest* are some of the most respected names in the industry, and with so many working on the titles, it's no surprise that they've managed such astounding sales figures. "All of us meeting was actually just luck," Horii laughs. "I used to write a comic book in Japan called *Shonen-Jump,* and working on that led to me meeting Toriyama – the man who is now well-known for his illustrative work with *Dragonball.* We talked and I soon found that he really liked videogames. He jumped at the chance when I mentioned that we could work on a games project together."

Toriyama is only one part of the team that has aided the *Dragon Quest* series' success. Ex-Fuji Television Network and pop legend, Kouichi Sugiyama, has risen as one of the most famous composers in Japan thanks to his work on the franchise. "How we got together with Sugiyama is a little strange," Horii tells us. "We were receiving feedback from players for a chess game we'd been working on when we got some feedback from a Koichi Sugiyama. We immediately recognised the name and said: 'Isn't that the really famous guy?' We just had to get him on board."

Of course, it's now unquestionably obvious that it was, indeed, an extremely good idea. Sugiyama's music is about as famous as videogame soundtracks come, and despite having worked in various areas of pop music and movie score, it's his *Dragon Quest* concerts that draw in crowds of all ages in Japan. "I remember having doubts," he says with a smile.

"I remember thinking to myself: 'Classical music doesn't suit games, does it?' But it worked. If you think about it, this is music that you're going to be listening to for a long period of time. Classical music was simply a stroke of genius."

In fact, when *Dragon Quest VIII* is launched over here, we'll be treated to the full orchestral score rather than the midi-esque ditties which have been heard on other shores. As nice as this is, there's a good chance that this bonus – along with the entire package – will be overlooked in Europe. Something which would have excited Japanese gamers runs the risk of being completely ignored in Europe due to different markets – a shame, as it's taken a lot of consideration and large amount of time for Horii to make the game as good as it is… "When we first set about creating the series, we went to Spain and Egypt to do research," he informs us. "Of course, the problem was that way back then the hardware was very primitive – I just set out to see if I could create the experience that was in my mind."

Horii is now famed for that game he visualised. With each instalment of *Dragon Quest*, he's managed to move a little closer to fully realising his idea, and the mass of followers the series has accumulated have supported him every step of the way. "The players we have are very unique. As you approach the end of a game, you find the princess and your job is to carry her home. The problem is, our players didn't do this. Instead of taking her home, the princess ended up being walked into a final boss battle." We look a little sheepish, realising that we were some of those people. Hey, if there's a chance to lead a defenseless princess into a life-threatening situation, then we'll be at the front of the queue. "I realised that this would be the case," he continues knowingly, "so I created a situation where the princess would become angry if she was put in the situation. This idea has been evolved now and you can pretty much do what you want as long as you can cope with the consequences. In short, over the last 20 years, we've managed to create a living, breathing anime. You're the hero. You make the decisions." It's a nice thought – let's just hope that European gamers can appreciate it.

Dragon Quest VIII *is due out in April and was reviewed in issue 38.*



"I REMEMBER THINKING TO MYSELF, 'CLASSICAL MUSIC DOESN'T SUIT GAMES, DOES IT?'"

YUJI HORII

COMMUNITY

EVERY ISSUE, games™ VISITS A DIFFERENT DEVELOPER. THIS MONTH, IT'S OFF TO THE BLIZZCON EVENT FOR A CHAT WITH BLIZZARD

BLIZZARD ENTERTAINMENT

SNOW ISN'T COMMON IN LOS ANGELES BUT LOOK HARD AND YOU'LL FIND A BLIZZARD IN FULL FORCE. JUST BE SURE TO WRAP UP WARM FOR THE COLD ONLINE FRONT…

Early morning in Anaheim, California, and games™ is whistling *The Ballard Of Leeroy Jenkins* as we stroll past a huge queue of people standing outside the Anaheim Convention Centre. And when we say huge, we mean huge; it stretches as far as the eye can see in both directions and, despite comprising mostly average-looking men and women, is peppered with colourful costumes and those who've seen fit to bring their virtual personas into the real world. This is the reality of BlizzCon, the first event of its kind held by Blizzard Entertainment as a way of saying thank you to its fans, celebrating the worlds it has created and, of course, making a few announcements. Not long ago, all this was a pipedream for Blizzard CEO Mike Morhaime, now it's over 8,000 people standing outside a building full of computers, waiting patiently for the doors to open.

■ "I can't explain it, I'm blown away by how successful BlizzCon has been," says Frank



■ BlizzCon wasn't just about playing *World Of Warcraft* – it was about meeting like-minded gamers and showing support for the developer behind all their enjoyment, too.

■ Blizzard's top man, Mike Morhaime – a man of few words and even fewer decent answers.

Pearce, Blizzard's VP of technology and one of the company's founding fathers. "I think the whole thing's been influenced by a number of factors, such as our emphasis on gameplay, or that we inject a lot of personality into our worlds. When you look at the *Warcraft* universe, it's vibrant and interesting and I think that's definitely a factor. I also think it's the online gaming component – we've had Battlenet for ages, dating back to when we launched *Diablo*, and I think that online community is probably one of the bigger factors of what you see here."

Indeed, it's the online part of its franchises that's taken Blizzard from being just another largely PC-based developer to having the consumer clout to host an event like BlizzCon successfully. Even its earlier titles, *Diablo* and *Starcraft*, allowed gamers to play with each other, although there's no doubt that *World Of Warcraft* has thrown the developer more into the online spotlight than ever. Progressing from a studio that makes standalone products to one that requires continual support and work on the part of the company has been a monumental task for Blizzard, although that certainly hasn't stopped it grabbing the massively multiplayer bull by its online horns.

"Supporting over four and a half million subscribers is our biggest challenge right now," confesses Pearce.

"SOMETHING THAT WE OFTEN DO IS SET A STANDARD THAT'S DIFFICULT TO MAINTAIN. I THINK WE'RE OUR OWN HARSHEST CRITICS"

FRANK PEARCE, VP OF TECHNOLOGY, BLIZZARD ENTERTAINMENT

"When we launched *World Of Warcraft* in North America, the capacity that we projected for the first year was consumed within the first two months. It's been the same in Europe and Asia as well. The response to *WOW* is way beyond anything I could have imagined, and that's one of the biggest challenges we face on the technology side. We've never been a technology-driven development studio; we've always tried to ensure that the minimum system requirements for the PC games we release will reach a maximum audience, because we want to get these fun games into the hands of as many people as we can."

And it's this determination to expand its fan base, to ensure that the games aren't just tailored for those familiar with the Blizzard brand, but to attract completely new gamers. That sets the developer out from the crowd. Its current work on *Starcraft: Ghost*, for instance, is proof of that, if only because it sees Blizzard, once again,

BLIZZARD COMES FULL CIRCLE

"*Starcraft: Ghost* is our first console title in a long time," admits Sams when confronted with the fact that before *Ghost* its last console games were the likes of *Blackthorn* and *The Lost Vikings*. "Our roots are console, that's where it started, and they've always been near and dear to our hearts. But there hadn't been a point where there was a game we wanted to make that was most appropriate on console until *Ghost*. Our philosophy is that we only make games that we, as gamers, want to play. We only hire gamers, and the people that end up applying fall into our core demographic. We let them decide what they want to make for the company, and then let them go after it. I think that helps us get where we are today, it's why when we decided to do *Ghost*, all these gamers were saying let's make this happen, this is going to be fun, this is how we visualise the *Starcraft* universe on a console."

AND ON THE SEVENTH DAY

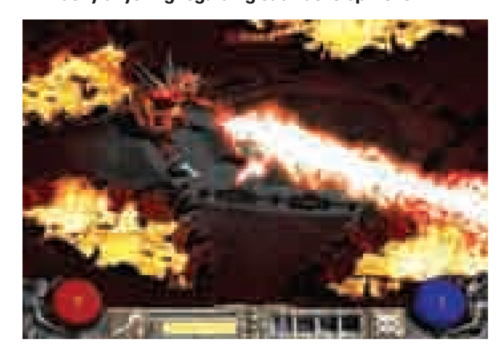
WARCRAFT

From Blizzard's first hit in 1994 to its biggest game to date, the *Warcraft* series has done the developer proud. In moving from RTS to MMO-style gameplay, Blizzard has turned the *Warcraft* universe into a phenomenon, one that we suspect will be recognised by gamers for many years to come.



DIABLO

In 1997, Blizzard's second massive hit began to focus on co-operative dungeon exploring and item collection. A third instalment in the *Diablo* series has been talked about by fans for some time, although in its inimitable way, Blizzard has yet to confirm or deny anything regarding such development.



STARCRAFT

Hot on the heels of *Diablo* came Blizzard's third chart-topper which returned to its RTS roots while adding a more sci-fi flavour in favour orcs. *Starcraft: Ghost* has seen a troubled development, but now appears to be on track to deliver the experience that Blizzard has intended from the very beginning.





IN THE BLOOD

Meet the Blood Elves, Blizzard's newest race for the *World Of Warcraft* universe, due to be introduced in the soon-to-be-released *Burning Crusades* add-on pack. Though once aligned with the *Alliance*, a thirst for power drove them to the darker side of the world. Talk about having issues…





stepping into a genre it's never dabbled in before. Although perhaps the fact that it's determined to create a convincing *Starcraft* game with a third-person action slant (as opposed to a solid action game wrapped in *Starcraft* clothing) is most important. Few developers would afford themselves the luxury of dictating the progress and direction of titles – in fact, we can only think of id Software in that respect – and yet that's where Blizzard finds itself.

"It's an excellent position to be in," admits Paul Sams, VP of business development at Blizzard. "Don't be confused though, we've had multiple parent companies with whom we've had very good relationships. Over the years, we've been able to build up a relationship and they trust us enough to give us a bit of space. But like every parent company we've ever had, they get a very clear message from our management – and I mean crystal clear – we do what we want to do and if anyone wants to tell us otherwise, we can all leave. Our management will say that to anybody, the people at Vivendi know that. It's not a threat, it's nothing personal, it's just that we literally have blue gaming blood running through our veins. This company is important to us and we're not

STARCRAFTS IN THEIR EYES

The *Starcraft* universe, much like *Warcraft*, is packed full of character and style, so it's no surprise that this is being retained for *Starcraft: Ghost*. The game's come a long way…





PERFECTLY CHILLED

1 FRANK PEARCE, SENIOR VP OF TECHNOLOGY
IN A NUTSHELL: One of Blizzard's founding members and the driving force behind many of the developer's titles. Every art and programming team within Blizzard reports directly to Pearce.

2 PAUL SAMS, SENIOR VP OF BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT
IN A NUTSHELL: Despite his corporate title – Sams has worked on the development of many franchises over his 12-year tenure at Blizzard, and isn't set to give up caring about them any time soon.

about to have a parent company or some quarter requirement or anything like that change what we do."

Whether Vivendi likes it or not, it's a promise that many of the company's staff stand by and it's clearly something that does its games far more good than harm. Unfortunately, some have followed through on the promise regardless of the relative freedom that Blizzard allows its staff. For example, seeing old hands such as Bill Roper and several others from the original *Diablo* team walk out on the company they helped build certainly couldn't have been easy. But then, as is evident from the event about to unfold, Blizzard is as strong as ever, despite the losses – probably because the company could have written the book on self-preservation and restoration.

"Blizzard's not about one person, it's a collection of men and women who are hardcore gamers and who want to blow people's minds," says Sams. "When folks leave, many of them have made great contributions to our company and are people we're very thankful for, who we'll miss, who we love. They're all extended family. But at the end of the day, Blizzard's more than that. Some of the people who helped start it are still here and they work very hard on training others so that when people leave – and it's inevitable – we have the next group of brilliance coming up, the people who got the chance to train under those who have left. It's all about growing each of our replacements, because when all of us go – and that won't be for a long time, I assure you – we want to make sure we hand over to a group of people who we grew, who are our protégés, who've gone through the fire together with us. We have no intention to stop making Game-Of-The-Year products now. We've had nine hits in a row, but I want to see 25 in a row before I even think about leaving."

Of course, the only people who can decide whether that'll be the case are the very people **games™** is walking past right now – the ones queuing up for BlizzCon, not to mention the millions who couldn't make the trip. Such passion for one developers' titles is testament to the quality Blizzard prides itself on, and also represents just how different the company is to a lot of other publisher-owned developers worldwide. This isn't about money, about pleasing the shareholders or about churning out several titles a year – it's akin to the attitude of original bedroom coders back when gaming first began, multiplied by a lot. "This is a lot of who we are, it's a love of ours, these franchises are like our extra children," says Sams. "Aside from my family and my kids, Blizzard is the most important thing to me, and I'd say that's the case for any of these guys. We feel we're part of something great, we feel like we're a part of gaming history, and we have no intention of stepping away from that and not treating it with the respect we think it deserves."

"THERE'S NO PARTICULAR TITLE THAT INSPIRED JOE. IT'S MORE THE FEELING I HAD WHILE PLAYING 2D SIDE-SCROLLING ACTION GAMES WHEN I WAS YOUNGER"
ATSUSHI INABA



The Players

IF IT WASN'T FOR THOSE BUTTER ADS, WE'D BE TELLING YOU HOW MUCH WE ALL LOVE CLOVER. THEN AGAIN, WHEN THE COMPANY PRESIDENT HAS AN ANIMATED FLICK-BOOK FOR A BUSINESS CARD, YOU CAN SEE WHY

ATSUSHI INABA

CLOVER STUDIO

It's the middle of the afternoon in Osaka, Japan and games™ is feeling bad. Not because of the brisk Japanese winter that waits for us outside, or the possibility that soon we'll be running off to Nippombashi Den-Den Town to look at the stupidly large high-definition televisions and stacks of Xbox 360s, you understand. No, it's because one of Capcom's most important people, the president of Clover Studio, Atsushi Inaba, is apologising to us. Rather profusely, we might add. But then, we did ask for it – having told him of the anguish we went through with *Viewtiful Joe: Double Trouble*, playing yet another level made up entirely of boss fights we'd already won, it was only to be expected.

"I'm really sorry about that," says Inaba, almost humbly. "We're not looking to punish the players, but we want them to really look forward to the last boss. Especially with *Joe*, where it's kind of an homage to other 2D side-scrollers. We just think it fits." And try as we might, we step in – surely when such a theme of punishment runs through an entire game, isn't there just a little bit of sadism creeping into the design? "We didn't set out to make the games *really* difficult, a lot of that has to do with what the staff have done on their own," he insists. "But I am proud to have made a series that's lasting and I think that you have to think about game design as a concept when making a game. We're pleased that the concept still stands up. It wasn't like I had the sadistic desire to make really difficult games. I want to make lots of different things, whether they're easy or they're hard."

Of course, difficulty isn't the only thing that Clover's games all have in common – there's also the matter of their visual style. While we're loathed to use the word 'art' when describing the likes of *Okami* and *Viewtiful Joe*, they are incredibly beautiful (or even viewtiful) games with a very distinct look. But that doesn't mean that's all we can expect from the developer in the future.

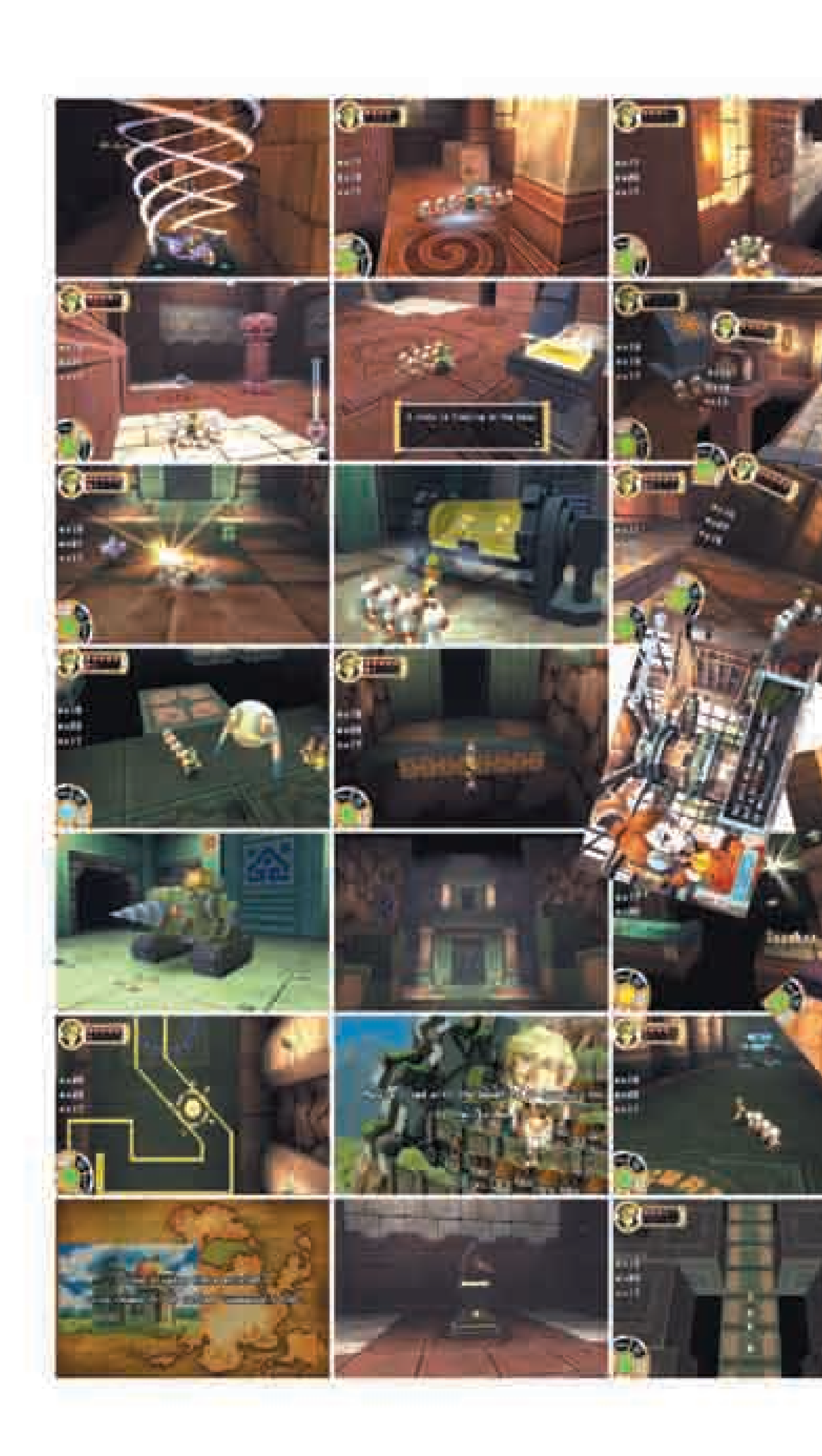
"At Clover, we don't have any barriers set up on how we want the games to look," says Inaba. "The director on the *Joe* games and also on *Okami* is really into his visual look and wants to make beautiful things. But we don't have any set policy that says we can't have blood or horror images in our games; that's just the way things are at the moment." Another interjection – considering Inaba's last project before forming Clover – was the very grey, very not-cel-shaded *Steel Battalion*, can we expect to see something along those lines instead? "There's no reason why we couldn't go back to that style," he says. "I like military technology and I also like robots, so that's why *SB* looks the way it does. If there's an opportunity to make a game that needs a different graphical style, there's nothing stopping us and we'll go that way – there's nothing binding us to the visual style of *Joe* and *Okami*."

While Clover is already looking to bigger things, there's still the small matter of *Joe*'s popularity explosion. The red-hot wonder has gone from being the star of a relatively niche (but very enjoyable) title to having a string of games, plenty of merchandise and even his own animated series. A case of the name becoming too big for its heroic boots, perhaps? "We don't have that worry," admits Inaba, "because we really enjoy what the other people are doing with *Joe*. As far as our relationship with *Joe* goes, we want to keep it fresh as well. Nobody on the team really has that worry, that *Joe* is going to become something else that we didn't want it to be." And what exactly does Inaba want him to be? "To me, Joe is a character that I love and treasure," he adds. "When I made the first *Joe* game, I wanted it to be a side-scrolling beat-'em-up game like I used to play in the arcade when I was younger, and now that it's on multiple platforms and multiple media, I think it's something that's going to last."

And last he most probably will – after all, animated characters never die, they just end up in re-runs. Sure, so he's a shameless rip-off of a million Japanese Sentai characters (Inaba admits it; he likes *Power Rangers* the best) but then that's hardly the point when *Joe* has become the success he is in such a short time. Kind of like Inaba himself, in fact. Although we don't dare tell him that, of course — if we did, he's likely to start apologising all over again.

Viewtiful Joe: Red Hot Rumble is out now and was reviewed in issue 40.

REVIEWS



THE AVERAGE

Scoring's a messy business when it comes to videogames, so we keep things as simple as possible here at games™. Marking out of a possible ten, a game that is decidedly average will score five – that doesn't necessarily mean it's bad, just that it doesn't do anything particularly special against its peers. We also refuse to bow to PR pressure, meaning scores are our genuine opinion: we sing the praises of the great games and give the lesser ones the scorn they deserve. You might not always agree with us, but we're just trying to help – after all, everyone has an opinion, right?



DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
Xbox

OTHER FORMATS
Playstation2, PC, Playstation Portable

ORIGIN
UK

PUBLISHER
Sega

DEVELOPER
Sumo Digital

PRICE
£34.99

RELEASE
31 March

PLAYERS
1 (2-6 Online)

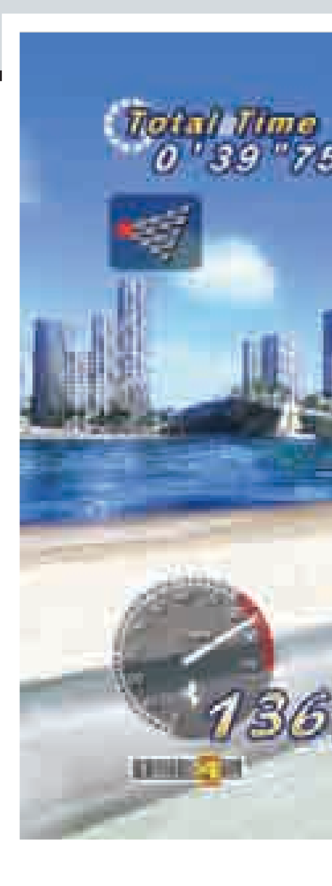
THE BEAUTIFUL JOURNEY IS BACK

OUTRUN 2006: COAST 2 COAST

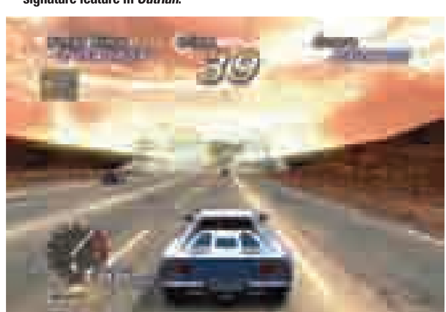
There's something so eminently likeable about *OutRun* that it's almost impossible to object to its existence. Some may baulk at the cartoon handling, or the lack of tracks and replay value, but all of this quickly diminishes the second the orange hue of a setting sun cascades over the bonnet on a lovingly crafted Ferrari as it hurtles toward the distant horizon taking Magical Sound Shower as a musical accompaniment. It's pure pleasure gaming. The 'beautiful journey', indeed.

Sega knows this better than anyone, so with *OutRun 2006*, the Japanese publisher has taken no risks and placed development back into the hands of Sheffield's Sumo Digital, the team who performed sterling work porting *OutRun2* to Xbox – a task many thought impossible. Sumo's experience shows from as early as the first corner. That drift mechanic that defined the updates is translated immaculately, and anyone familiar with the series will feel right at home. So much so, in fact, that it feels almost unnecessary during the opening races. The game plays so similarly to its predecessor that many may feel aggrieved at paying out for a near identical experience.

Only when the full extent of *OutRun 2006*'s mission modes is explored will players see just how much extra effort has gone into the creation of *Coast 2 Coast*. The bulk of Single-player mode will be spent flitting between Flagman missions and impressing the ladies in Heart Attack challenges. Flagman, the chubby chequered flag-waving fellow who starts each race, sets a series of challenges varying from maximising your own drift time to gaining an unassailable lead over a rival, but is mainly focused on 12 and 15-car point-to-point races. The beauty of this mode is the ingenious course design which casts logic and continuity aside in favour of variety and surprise. *Coast 2 Coast* comprises the track selections of *OutRun2* and its arcade update *SP*, but instead of *OutRun2*'s rigid grid of road sections, the flagman missions pick



"EVERY CHALLENGE BRINGS WITH IT A SURPRISE, AND THE COMPULSION TO PLOUGH THROUGH THEM IS SPAWNED FROM THE CURIOSITY OF EXACTLY WHAT COMBINATION MIGHT TURN UP NEXT"



The ever-changing skyline is a signature feature in *OutRun*.



Drifting – the art of *OutRun*. Nothing beats taking a hairpin at 90 degrees.



LIVE LINE

***OutRun2* had one of the most underrated online modes of any title on the original Xbox. It was a contrast to the usual ultra-competitive battlefields that made up the Xbox Live landscape, instead allowing players to chat idly as they sped around the gorgeous scenery. The only problem was no one ever played it. *Coast 2 Coast's* online modes should offer more of the same, supporting six-player races across both the *OutRun* and *SP* track setups. Hopefully, players will put down *Halo 2, Burnout Revenge* and *Battlefield 2* long enough to actually play it this time.**



■ There's a solid number of challenges to keep players occupied.



■ It's not quite San Andreas, but the Golden Gate Bridge still looks cool.





■ Some may say this looks like San Francisco. And they'd be correct.

and choose portions at will and string them together to make completely unique courses. Every challenge brings with it a new surprise, and the compulsion to plough through all of them is spawned from the curiosity of just what combination might turn up next.

The updated Heart Attack modes make up the second half of the single-player missions, and offer more of the same mixture of amusing challenges that made *OutRun2's* equivalents so diverting. However, the structure has been improved and now bases your performances on an average grade over the entire grid of courses. Each track section can be tackled individually (as long as it has been attempted once), so favourite challenges can be replayed without having to restart an entire race. From hitting civilian vehicles to driving through arcs of fire, the challenges offer something pleasingly different to all the drifting, and will appeal to anyone obsessed by the bettering of their own high scores. Our particular favourite is the new Beach Ball Dribbling challenge which tasks the player with knocking an enormous ball as far down the track as possible. Something so ridiculously overt that it could only ever belong in a videogame is typical of Sega, and is an ethos present in every area of *Coast 2 Coast*.

Of course, the OutRun modes that made *OR2* so successful in both arcade and Xbox guises make a welcome return. The system of forging your own path through the course is present and correct, and still splits opinion as it did upon the release of *OutRun2*. Those who accuse the game of being finishable within five minutes will never get

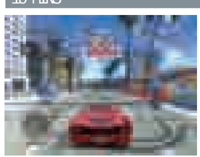


"MANY HOURS WILL BE SPENT IMPROVING TIMES AND CASUALLY POWERSLIDING THROUGH SOME OF THE MOST DELECTABLE ENVIRONMENTS THE CURRENT-GEN MACHINES HAVE EVER PRODUCED"

TIMELINE HIGHLIGHTS

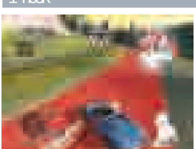
THE BEST BITS IN THE GAME AND WHEN YOU CAN EXPECT TO SEE THEM

10 MINS



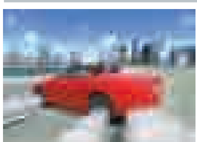
At this early stage, sketchy visuals, identical gameplay and a slightly juddery frame rate all mean that you may well be questioning your decision to purchase *OutRun 2006*.

1 HOUR



That drifting technique you'd perfected, has come back and now the visuals seem more than acceptable. You're settling back into the 'OutRunning' nicely.

2 DAYS

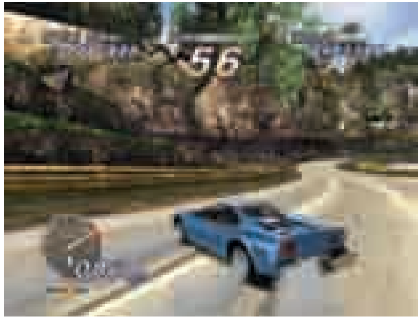


You've blasted through most of the Flagman challenges and enjoyed a few sedate games over Xbox Live. You question your decision to purchase no longer.

along with the *OutRun* ideology. It's a very valid point, but the game is designed for players who want to replay the tracks and better their own performance, not those who demand a constant stream of fresh challenges. As universally likeable as the first run is, the long-term appeal will only ring true with certain sections of the gaming fraternity.

Even the simple OutRun modes of *Coast 2 Coast* now offer both the full versions of *OutRun2* and *SP*, and many more hours will be spent improving times and casually powersliding through some of the most delectable environments the current-gen machines have ever produced. Unfortunately, the clarity of the visuals doesn't quite match up to the Xbox version of *OutRun2* – a slight hit in detail, surely caused by the *SP* tracks' extra memory consumption. At first, it's disappointing – the beautiful journey has put on a few pounds and developed a skin condition – but when the road opens out and a breathtaking waterfall pours into view, or you see the track stretch far into the distance on the Grand Canyon-themed section, it will matter very little.

Whereas the graphics may be slightly inferior, the overall speed of the game has been kicked up a notch, only adding to the feeling of tearing



In any other game, this would result in a hideous crash.

down the tarmac in a Ferrari. Unlocking the incredible SuperAmericana is a treat that this added velocity amplifies considerably. Finally, the raw power of the Italian supercars is fully realised in an *OutRun* game, which, coupled with the new slipstream mechanic, means that racing is a more substantial experience than in the previous outing.

This sublime videogame is only let down by its focus on repetition. Despite the mission mode mixing up the tracks and allowing more variables than any other *OutRun* game, there's no escaping the feeling of déjà vu every time you speed under the canopy of cherry blossoms or slide emphatically around a coastal road hairpin. Although it's clear that, with *Coast 2 Coast*, Sega hopes to reach a far broader market than it ever managed with *OutRun2* – and for those who've never experienced the game, 2006's version provides a very competent package – the distinctly retro themes of time improvement and hi-score

It never veers too far from arcade loveliness. That's the *OutRun* way.



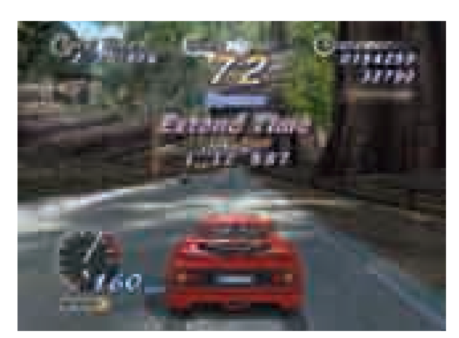


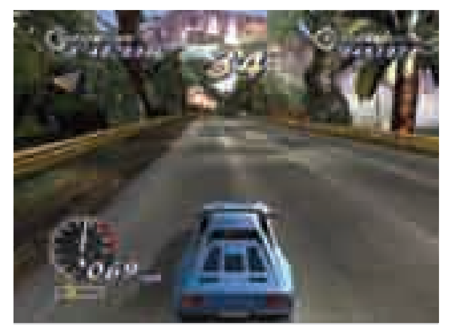
Pick a lane. Any lane. Come on, fool, there's six to choose from.



CARS IN YOUR EYES

It's no coincidence that almost everyone who plays Gotham 3 online races in an Enzo Ferrari. They're beautiful machines, and part of the joy of OutRun has always been sitting behind the wheel of one of the world's great supercars and enjoying the ride. Coast 2 Coast doesn't disappoint, offering 15 of the beauties to choose from, including the ferocious F430 Spider, the Superamericana and the incredibly sexy 550 Barchetta. The cars don't offer much difference in performance (although they do have unique statistics), so the choice is mainly aesthetic. Whatever looks best…





■ The scenery wouldn't look out of place in a 360 title.

tests may well prove unpalatable for those brought up on *Burnout* and *Need For Speed*.

Veterans will love how the new game plays, but may refuse to invest in a title so similar to one they already own. It's a risk, albeit one that Sega has done its best to compensate for with its vast range of modes and game types, but there's still the chance that *Coast 2 Coast* will fade into obscurity. To let it do so would be criminal, especially for those who never played *OR2* (be it a lack of interest or a lack of Xbox). As an example of videogaming in its purest form, this is a superb achievement, and one that never stops being fun, no matter how many times you see Palm Beach or the Vegas-inspired strip. It's unabashedly repetitive, cartoony and not as pretty as many would like, but it's still the most beautiful journey yet.



VERDICT 8/10

NOTHING HUGELY NEW, BUT EFFORTLESSLY ENTERTAINING



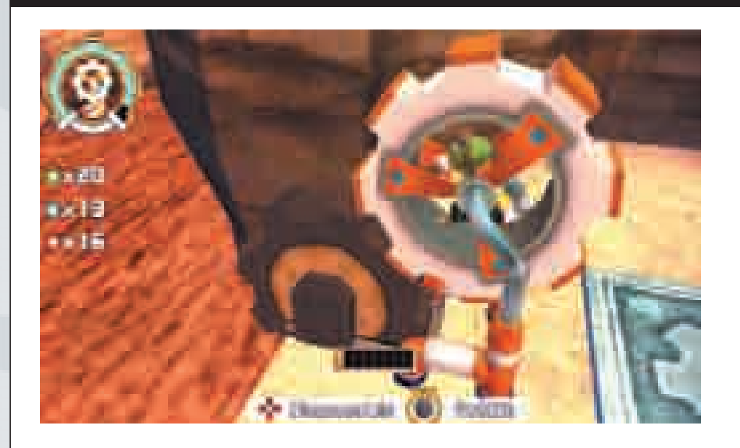
■ The new slipstream feature makes racing a slightly more tactical affair.

PSP

The jewel in Sega's crown, the PSP version is a phenomenon. Smooth, fast, sleek and sexy, and mercifully one of the few games with simple enough controls to work well on Sony's portable. Whether it can compete with *Burnout Legends, Ridge Racer* and *WipEout* in sales terms is another matter, of course.

PS2

Quite how Sumo has managed to get the PS2 to perform at this incredibly high level is beyond us, but it matters not, as *OutRun 2006* on this format is almost as lovely as that of the Xbox. Slight dips in frame rates here and there don't spoil what is a mammoth achievement.





DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation Portable

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Tecmo

DEVELOPER
In-House

PRICE
$39.99

RELEASE
TBA '06
(Japan/US: Out Now)

PLAYERS
1

I'M A LITTLE ROBOT, SHORT AND STOUT…

TOKOBOT

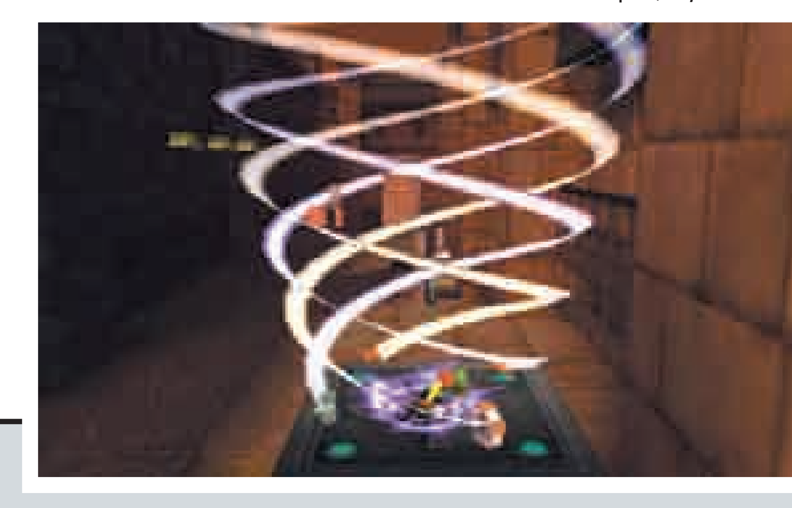
Whenever a reviewer states that a game has 'charm', it's usually quite an ambiguous statement to make. Charm in the videogame sense usually tends to denote something inscrutable that, nonetheless, makes it that little bit more enjoyable. The reasoning behind why *Tokobot* has charm, though, is immediately evident: the game is full of adorable little robots. And those adorable little robots turn what would normally be a pretty traditional platform puzzle game with a bit of a twist into something rather more special.

For a game that's centred on commanding futuristic robots, *Tokobot* is surprisingly old-school in terms of its gameplay. It is essentially another platform game but one in which your protagonist – a young archaeologist – is followed around by a tiny army of little robotic helpers with which he can form bridges, attack enemies or even fly short distances in order to navigate the ruins of an ancient yet highly technological civilisation. It's somewhere between the cross-pollination of *Pikmin* and *Jak And Daxter*, set in a *Zelda* dungeon, incorporating a *Metroid Prime*-style progressive acquisition of abilities. The Tokobots trail around after you in one of three formations, and by holding hands with them the protagonist can perform a wide variety of joint actions that make getting around the ruins considerably easier.

Despite its apparent complexity, though, it's a very simple game at heart. Although you'll be exploring several different regions with your Tokobots, each area is just a dungeon, a linear sequence of puzzles and platform challenges during which you'll occasionally acquire some new abilities which, in turn, will allow you to get to previously inaccessible sections of former levels. Despite it being generally advantageous to keep your Tokobots by your side at all times, you never need to protect or preserve them. Whatever happens, they just get up and run after you again, and should you ever lose one, holding down the R button recalls all of them to your side anyway.

Using the robots to navigate the surrounding environment becomes second nature in no time – not that it ever really needs to, as the game does have a rather unfortunate affinity for signposting. Glowing magnets signify anything that the Tokobots can stick to, and swiftly remove any need for thought or creativity from proceedings – the challenge usually comes from the game's platforming elements rather than from figuring out its little puzzles. The game will occasionally have you scratching your head at a slightly obscure solution, but it's never usually anything more than trying everything the Tokobots can do until a solution inevitably emerges.

What's more, whenever a special Karakuri combination move is needed, there's a



Most of the Karakuri formations are only used at certain points – it's all a bit forced in places, really.

FINGERPRINT

WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE

FUTURE: Technology litters *Tokobot's* world – from the Tokobots themselves to huge mech fortresses…

PAST: …which is why its distinctly old-school platform-based gameplay feels a little out of place.

VALMORPHANISE

Among the Tokobot abilities that you discover, throughout the game are major transformations called Karakuri combinations; the Tokobots combine to form one super-powerful robot, Transformers-style. As well as offensive combinations such as the tank, the catapult and the ever-fabulous floaty samurai, there are several specific abilities that can only be activated in certain places and serve to open up new bits of levels, like train and crane transformations. Sadly, the Karakuri combinations rarely need to be used, and it's clearly signposted when a particular one would be effective – but that doesn't make the floaty samurai any less brilliant.





Tokobot's charm is found in the bots that help you to complete the puzzles and challenges.

panel on the floor indicating which one; you're never left to figure out your own solutions. Even if a new ability unlocks a part of a previous level, there's never any real need to go out of your way to explore it – you'll inevitably be sent there anyway at some later stage in your quest. When you consider the possibilities that having a miniature army of robots could have presented in terms of player creativity, it seems a little strange that the player isn't given more of a free reign over their abilities, and *Tokobot* occasionally feels inescapably linear. For a game that's essentially a traditional platformer, though, that's arguably to be expected.

Unfortunately, the fact that *Tokobot's* challenge lies in the platforming occasionally leads to immense levels of frustration due to the PlayStation Portable's relatively imprecise controls. We'd very much like to meet the person who wouldn't feel a strong urge to snap their handheld device in half after the twelfth failed attempt at swinging perfectly across a hazard-ridden chasm from a chain of miniature robots. The handheld's analogue stick is famously not the best in the world, and for playing a game that requires a fair amount of perfect jumping, it would certainly not be the control method of choice for any right-minded people, especially with its slightly eratic camera.

Tokobot may be disappointingly straightforward for a game that could have involved so much more player creativity in terms of solving puzzles, but it's still very enjoyable. And although it could appear to be nothing more than switch flipping, clever jumping and by-the-numbers puzzle solving in some people's eyes, in ours it's a skilful and entertaining twist on an old-fashioned platform concept. The marriage of futuristic setting and old-school gameplay; it's traditionality in no way detracts from its entertainment factor. It's somewhat mystifying, then, that nobody has yet claimed it for European release.

VERDICT 8/10

ESSENTIALLY BASIC, BUT NOVEL AND CHARMING

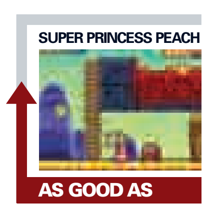
FAQs

Q. HOW MANY TOKOBOTS CAN YOU HAVE?
A. You start out with six, then increase your numbers up to eight and ten over time.

Q. AND HOW DOES THAT HELP?
A. It means you can reach further and attack enemies from a greater distance. And perform more powerful Karakuri combinations.

Q. HOW MANY COMBINATIONS ARE THERE?
Eight – a combination of offensive, puzzle and travel combinations.

SUPER PRINCESS PEACH



AS GOOD AS

WORSE THAN



PIKMIN 2

ROLL! ROLL, DAMN YOU!

SUPER MONKEY BALL: TOUCH & ROLL

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
Nintendo DS

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Sega

DEVELOPER
Sonic Team

PRICE
£29.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1-4

***Super Monkey Ball* requires precise control above all else.** From the series' inception on the GameCube to the present day, the joy of this charming puzzle game has always been found in the exact execution needed to work your way around the more difficult courses. And it's this exactness that's *Touch & Roll*'s fundamental snag: it requires precision from the DS – a platform that, some would argue, is inherently ill-suited to such finesse. Using the touch screen to work your way around anything but the easiest of courses will be enough to test the patience of the calmest people.

The problem is the lack of a defined area within which to work – you'll find yourself tracing the stylus over the entire screen in a wild effort to make that cursed little primate go in the direction you want. Similarly, the D-pad controls don't come anywhere close to emulating the elegance of control afforded by an analogue stick. The controls do function, but not with the degree of subtlety necessary for a *Monkey Ball* game; fumbling through the same courses that we've conquered a hundred times at home is far more frustrating and difficult than it ought to be.

It's in the mini-games however, rather than the classic challenges, that *Touch & Roll* finds its stride. Monkey Bowling, Racing, Golf, Fight and the all-new War and Hockey provide entertaining diversions. Because they rarely require exact control, the frustrations of the single-player challenges are almost entirely alleviated. With a few friends on a bus journey, this game is very entertaining – all the more frustrating when the controls, which we feel could have worked brilliantly, are slightly off the mark.

Touch & Roll is a fun package, but the control problems force you to all but disregard the main game and treat it, instead, as a collection of mini-games. As such, though, *Touch & Roll*'s silliness and fast-paced nature make it ideal for the handheld. It provides a variety of quality game modes and the multiplayer is also excellent. It's just a shame that what we really love about *Monkey Ball* – the single-player challenges – haven't become all they could have been.

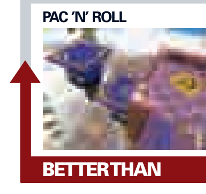


■ Mini-games such as the striking Monkey Bowling are fitting diversions from the rather disappointing main game.

games™ ENHANCED
IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL
IMPROVING: Bite-sized monkey-themed gameplay works really well on a handheld…
OR NOT: …but we do wish that the controls worked properly. It's very sad.

VERDICT 6/10
FALLS JUST THAT LITTLE BIT SHORT

PAC 'N' ROLL



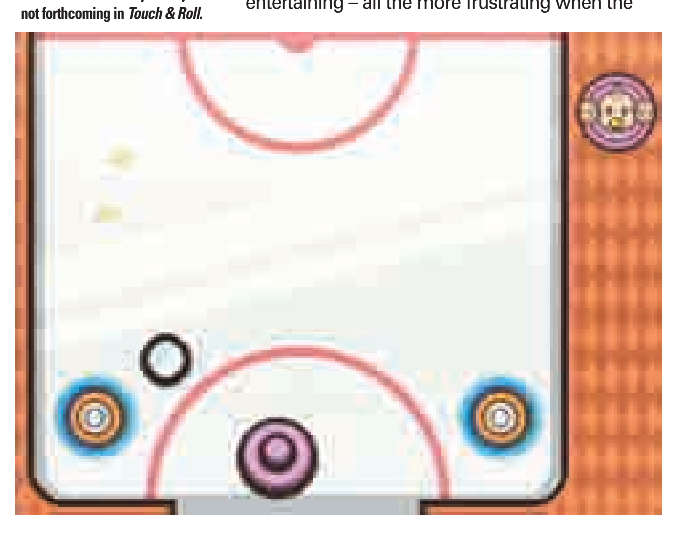
BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



SUPER MONKEY BALL DELUXE

■ *Monkey Ball* titles demand the kind of accuracy that's just not forthcoming in *Touch & Roll*.





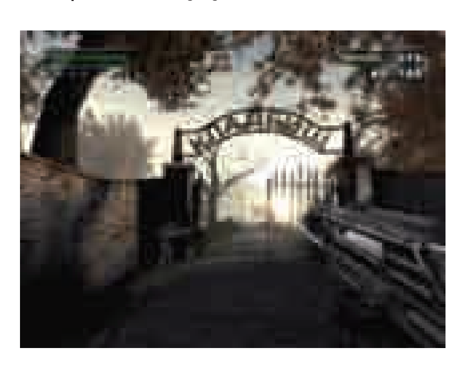

eMag

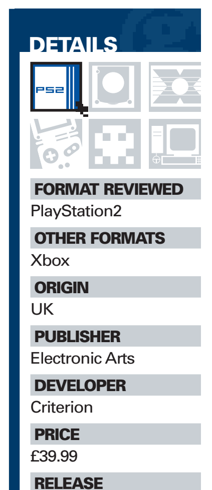
Blowing things up is lots of fun. You probably already know this but *Black* reminds you exactly how much fun.





We spent a lot of time laughing at stealth. It deserved it.





DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation2

OTHER FORMATS
Xbox

ORIGIN
UK

PUBLISHER
Electronic Arts

DEVELOPER
Criterion

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
24 February '06

PLAYERS
1

BLACK

IT'S CERTAINLY A SAFE BET

Taking a genre and giving it a good shake up is something that there's simply not enough of in the videogames industry. It seems as if 'me too' titles are considered a gamers staple diet; objects that we need to continue our existence. Of course, it's untrue. When a blood clot-inducing economy class trip across the Atlantic Ocean and a good nine hours spent perched next to an inevitably undesirable random are rewarded with an E3 that boasts no less that five *Halo* wannabes, anger is one of only two options available to your average human – the other is weeping.

This is why we like Criterion. A developer that refuses to conform, and dishes out quality in a somewhat different way. We're not going to claim that it's the most innovative studio around – that crown is stuck firmly on the all-waving, all-blowing, all-touching head of Nintendo, but when it comes to brightening up a somewhat stale genre – there seems to be nobody better.

Perhaps it was the influence of EA, but *Burnout 3* managed to breathe fresh life into a series that was far from dead, bringing all the destruction and chaos necessary to create a title that equalled the greatness of its forerunners without overshadowing them. Giving the racing genre this push has changed things forever and now, with Black, the studio has worked that same magic with the humble FPS.

The story here is unimportant. Attempting to contain what's on offer within a tale of terrorism and espionage is foolish. There is a story but, to be honest, the unskippable FMV that leads you into each mission is the only real low point of the whole package. No matter what you're led to believe, this game is all about guns, explosions and destruction.

It's fair to say that we've never encountered a first-person shooter quite like *Black*. Enemy AI is respectable, the levels are lengthy and sprawling, and all the guns that you'd expect to find contained within a title of this type are present and correct – in fact, at a glance, it's not dissimilar to some of the *Rainbow Six 3* outings. However, it soon becomes apparent that this first glance is astonishingly deceptive. Shotguns rip through pillars of stone rendering enemy cover useless, explosive canisters and fuel-filled vehicles wait to erupt in nearly every area of play, and rocket launchers and grenades rip multiple floors from buildings – it's manic.

> **"THE GAME'S GUNG-HO NATURE IS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE HIGH DIFFICULTY LEVEL, BECAUSE REFLEX THUMB DEXTERITY IS ESSENTIAL SHOULD YOU WISH TO EXPERIENCE SUCCESS"**

FAQs

Q. SO, NO MULTIPLAYER?
Afraid not. You'll be flying solo.

Q. WHY THE HELL NOT?
The bods at Criterion wanted to concentrate on making the single-player campaign awesome.

Q. DID THEY SUCCEED
Indeed, they did.



FINGERPRINT

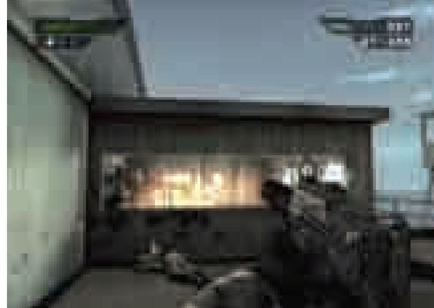
WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE

MAXIMUM CARNAGE: The team at Criterion truly are the kings of destruction.

BODY COUNT: More enemies to kill than in any other FPS. Ever.

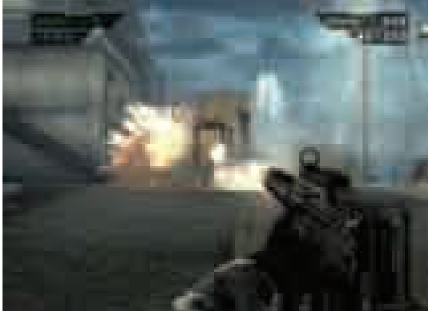
SILENCE IS GOLDEN

Finding absolutely everything in *Black* is going to take a fair old while. Secondary objectives are hidden all over the place and there are plenty of unlockables available for those who bother to track them down. Also hidden around are silencers for your weapons, and the nature of the game means that these items are hilarious. There's nothing funnier than finally finding a silencer, screwing it onto the end of a M16, then using it to turn a metal-smelting plant to rubble in the most unsubtle way ever. Genius.

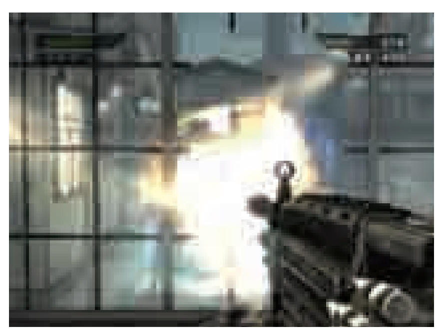




Boom. We have to admit, this was one of the most fun things ever.



We can only hope that the chap driving the truck was a bad man.



If we were soldiers, we wouldn't strand near explosive kegs.

In addition to the volatile environments, Criterion has poured a mammoth amount of enemies into the title. Clocking up 100 or so kills per mission is kids' stuff. There are literally hundreds of them, with you and your team sometimes taking on 40-50 variously armed goons just to reach a much-needed checkpoint.

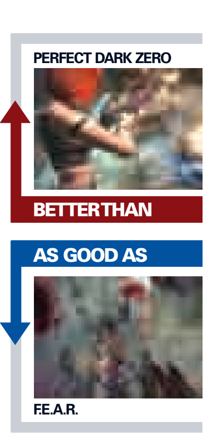
Having said that, it's not as though the game is totally devoid of tactics. Quite the opposite, in fact. Due to the large amount of damage that's being dished out, you tend to find yourself dead and bleeding rather quickly if you fail to use things such as weaponry and the environment correctly, often leaving you to begrudgingly repeat a large chunk of mission. It's actually the game's gung-ho nature that is responsible for the high difficulty of the title, because reflex and savage thumb dexterity are essential should you wish to experience success beyond anything but the first half of the game – much like *Burnout 3* and *Burnout Revenge*, then.

The cracks only really show once the action dies down. Sniping sections can be tedious, as can long treks around the occasional samey warehouses and docks. Also, we can't help but feel that the levels featuring the rest of your team could have been enhanced by giving some form of orders to the seemingly talentless recruits. Sure, they can see the 'machine gunner on the catwalk', but can they shoot him? Apparently not. Tell you what, we'll get him. That's 612 to us and none at all to you guys. Jackpot. Good work and all that.

Okay, it may all sound a little base, but *Black* is a game that reminds you that, at your core, you love things that go bang loudly – it's a good feeling to suddenly realise that you're just like everyone else. Wrap that up with superb level design, sleek gameplay and great visuals and you can't go far wrong.



VERDICT 8/10
DEFINITELY A BEAUTY



DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
Xbox 360

ORIGIN
Canada

PUBLISHER
Sega

DEVELOPER
Pseudo Interactive

PRICE
£49.99

RELEASE
February

PLAYERS
1-2 (1-8 Online)

FULLY AUTOMATIC FOR THE PEOPLE

FULL AUTO

FINGERPRINT
WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE
DESTRUCTION DERBY: More demolition than anyone has ever seen before. Fact!
RE-E-WIND: The Unwreck ability changes the whole racing dynamic

A lot of the talk circulating on gaming forums and in the specialist press of late surrounds the question 'How next-gen is the Xbox 360?'. With every new title, gamers analyse, dissect and deconstruct just what it offers in comparison to something from the previous generation. With *Gotham*, it's visuals and online integration, while *Condemned* has an unparalleled atmosphere aided by the 360's superior sound and lighting. Others are less effective; *FIFA '06* offers little more than rubber footballers and long loading times. With *Full Auto*, however, it's far less subtle. Once you've raced four laps round a city circuit and destroyed every last statue, bridge, vehicle and wall within, it becomes startlingly obvious how it makes use of that 360 muscle.

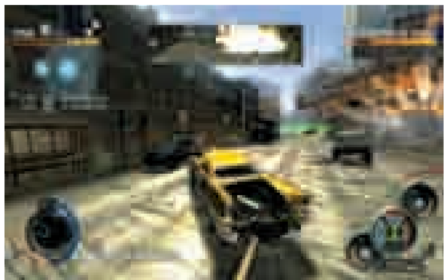
Yes, destruction is the order of the day here, and you'd be hard pushed to find another game that can do it better. Even after Sega made the bold claim that *Full Auto* had 'the most destructible environments in any game to date', no one could have expected exactly how much carnage could be caused with a souped-up muscle car and some generously sprayed machine-gun fire. If it can be seen, it can be smashed, and *Full Auto* rewards players with 'wreck points' for the amount of damage that they administer. Even though its roots are firmly fixed in racing, this game places equal importance on the demolition side of things.

The core of the single-player experience is *Full Auto*'s mammoth Career mode, which continually unlocks tracks, upgrades and rewards for progression. Unfortunately, the learning curve is slightly shallow. 30 races in and gaining gold medals (high placement and max wreckage) is still far too easy. Only when the Class A series is unlocked does the difficulty reach sufficiently satisfying levels. The driving engine demands high-level dexterity to avoid being continually blown up by your rivals – or a particularly vicious wall.

No matter what you do, how well you drive, how accurate you are with missile fire or how liberal with defensive mines, there's an inevitability to each and every race in *Full Auto*. Just as the only guarantee in life is death, the only guarantee in *Full Auto* is that you will explode. You can only survive in a hail storm of debris, bullets and shrapnel for so long, and in no time at all, the screen turns sepia, your pad rumbles viciously, and the twisted ball of metal and fire that you used to drive ejects a little rag doll driver into the stratosphere and certain death.

This would prove immensely irritating – á là *Jak X* – if it wasn't for the 'Unwreck' feature. Normally, if a new game crams a rewind feature in, our cynicism glands start to swell and immediately the game drops a few points in our estimation. However, in *Full Auto* it's superbly implemented

You'll get used to scenes like this as you leave a trail of destruction in your wake.







WEAPONS OF CHOICE

Progression in *Full Auto* would be impossible if it wasn't for the rather violent-looking hardware attached to the hood of each car. Initially, only a basic machine gun and mines are available, but before long the option to equip your vehicle with flamethrowers, missile launchers and grenades comes to the fore, and the sheer volume of destruction increases exponentially. Rivals can be taken down as in *Burnout*, and they're certainly inclined to return the gesture.



FAQs

Q. IS IT LIKE BURNOUT?
A bit. It's slower, but far more violent.

Q. IS IT BETTER THAN BURNOUT?
No. But it's a very pleasant alternative

Q. IS VIN DIESEL IN IT SOMEWHERE?
No. Why would Vin Diesel be in it?

and entirely necessary. It can be used liberally, and becomes a vital part of your arsenal when it comes to the tougher races. The ability to quickly Unwreck, spot where an enemy dropped a mine and then swerve to avoid it is as crucial as a picture-perfect powerslide.

Unfortunately, *Full Auto's* main strength is also its greatest downfall. An unabashed focus on pure destruction and visual spectacle has meant that the actual racing is somewhat limited. Once the awe of seeing an entire city crumble at your feet wears off (which does take a while, to be honest), you're left with a fun but ultimately one-dimensional action videogame that's unlikely to hold a player's attention for more than a few weeks. The nature of the racing is such that skill can sometimes feel arbitrary, likewise a near-perfect race can be spoiled by a well placed mine from an opponent at the last corner, meaning you finish in last place. By no means the worst offender of this in the genre, *Full Auto* is nevertheless infuriating to the core when you feel unfairly 'jipped' by your computer opponents.

That's not as infuriating as when a real person does it, mind. *Full Auto's* online mode supports up to eight players, and it'll be interesting to see if it takes off as a popular Live title on release. Although the worry of lag is prevalent (considering the frame rate in the offline modes), the game contains the classic recipe of attitude, violence and skill to make it a potential favourite among the teenage masses.

It's true, *Full Auto* is not a groundbreaker in the 'original' stakes, nor will it change people's perceptions of the medium of videogaming, but as an excuse to consume as many explosions as humanly possible, it's an extremely wholesome affair.



VERDICT 7/10
A BRUTAL ACTION RACER

TWISTED METAL: BLACK



BETTER THAN

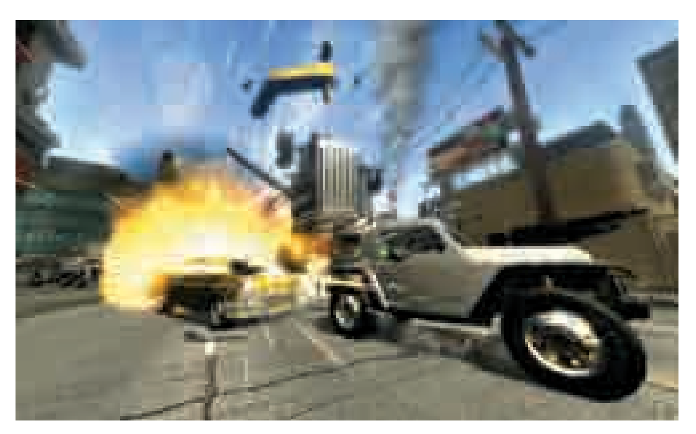
WORSE THAN



BURNOUT REVENGE

■ Don't panic, you're not going to get a speeding ticket, you'll get Wreck Points instead. Woohoo.





PUTTING A PORTABLE PRINCE IN YOUR POCKET

BOKU NO WATASHI NO KATAMARI DAMACY

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation Portable

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Namco

DEVELOPER
In-House

PRICE
¥4,600

RELEASE
TBA '06 (Japan: Out Now, US: April '06

PLAYERS
1 (2-4 Wi-Fi)

Honestly, these celestial beings – they just don't know their own strength. You'd have thought by now that the great King of the Cosmos, in all his cylindrical-headed wisdom, might have learnt to be a bit more careful during his frolicking after the first *Katamari Damacy* 'incident'. But no. One family vacation to Paradise Commonwealth Island, one reckless swimming excursion, one island-decimating tsunami… it all adds up. And now, you're back as the Prince, rolling up all the things in an effort to rebuild the islands for all the stranded animals. It's a conservation thing, apparently.

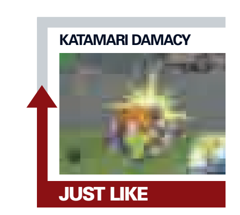
Clearly it's not a revolutionary thing – after all, *Boku No Watashi No Katamari Damacy* (AKA *Me And My Katamari* in the west) is barely any different from other games in the series. And yes, before you say it, we love it all the more for that, if only because we're easily pleased when it comes to rolling a sticky ball around. Of course, some of the regressions required to fit the game onto the PSP may cause fans of the more advanced sequel to grind their teeth. The game is far closer to the original in many respects (the way the katamari is often obscured behind obstacles or the rather less fantastical level settings, for instance), although it does feature some elements from its descendant such as levels where specific objectives, rather than size, are the order of the day.

But then there are the controls. Oh lord, the controls. To say they're fiddly to begin with is an understatement, a matter not helped by the movement from analogue to digital control for this version. It's the lack of precision that's most obvious, with the katamari feeling sluggish and often veering around at the most inopportune moments. Not what you need when against the clock. But then, it all just clicks. A few stages in and soon you're whizzing around levels, spotting perfectly sized objects among the sea of oversized ones and making a bee-line for them. It takes a bit of adjusting (particularly with the 'short cut' buttons that allow for moves like quick turning or boosting) but soon, you'll wonder why you needed twin analogues in the first place.

That it's the same game as before – albeit with new levels – isn't that important; that you can take it with you wherever you go and enjoy it at virtually any time is. And best of all, it's region free. So why don't you own it yet?

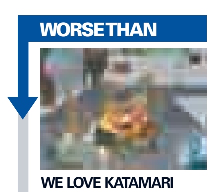
VERDICT 8/10
FIDDLY SOON GIVES WAY TO FABULOUS

KATAMARI DAMACY



JUST LIKE

WORSE THAN



WE LOVE KATAMARI

games™

CONNECTED

EXPANDING THE GAMEPLAY

COUSIN VS COUSIN: Up to four people can play against one another. Battle stages see you compete for object grabbing and, of course, you can even roll up your opponents if you become big enough.



Dressing up your cousins in all manner of stupid clothing and accessories is still just as much fun as ever.



The king's still in charge, obviously, and he'll help decide just how great an island you've helped to build.

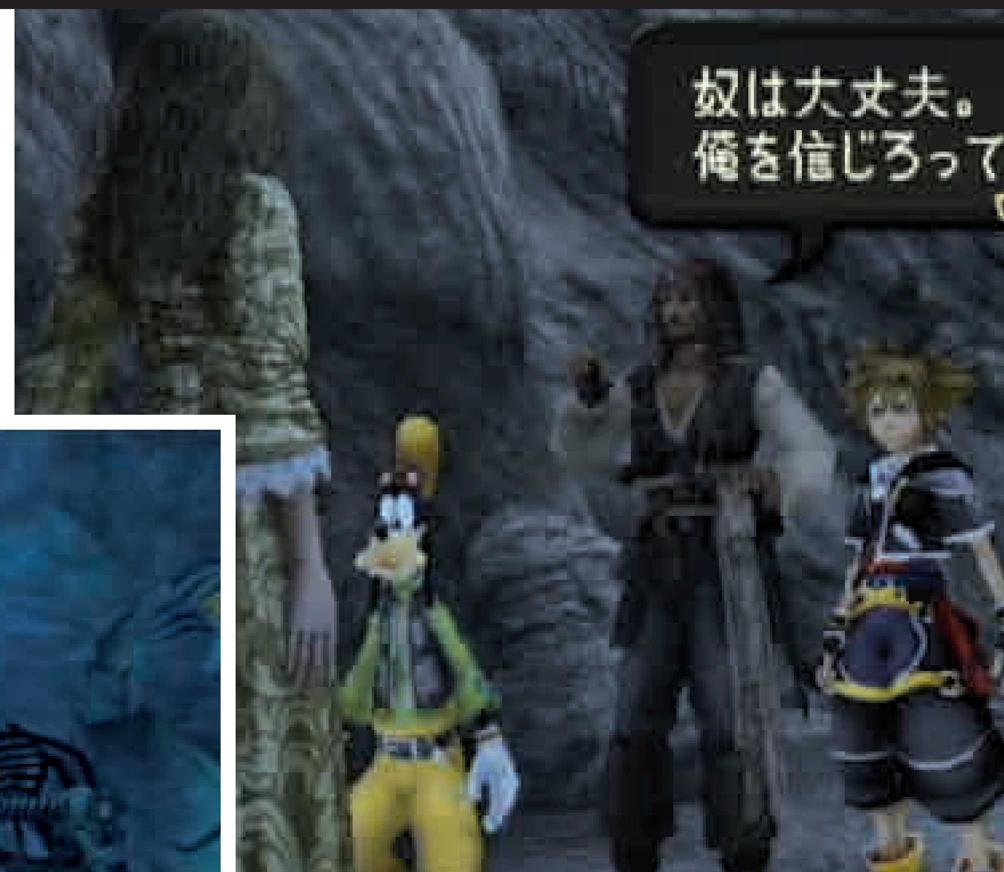

eMag



Where would any RPG be without its fair share of ladies for you to stare at for a while? These two are very thin. We notice little things like that.

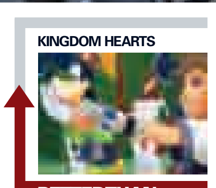


We like Johnny Depp because he's manly and attractive in an unthreatening way. That said, he looks kinda scary here.





KINGDOM HEARTS

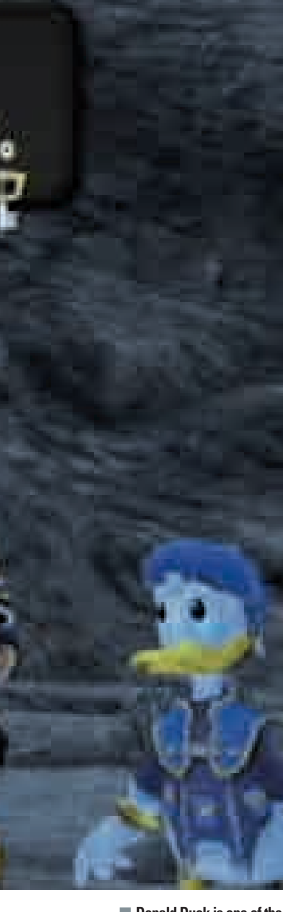


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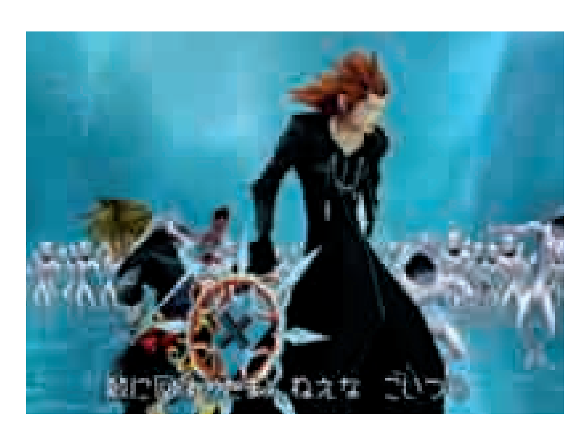
WORSE THAN



ZELDA: THE WIND WAKER



■ Donald Duck is one of the worst Disney characters ever. Walt told us. Fact.





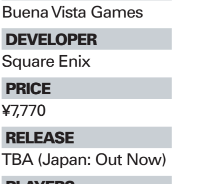
games™ **FUSED**

BRINGING GENRES TOGETHER

DISNEY: On the one hand, you've got the traditionally kiddy Disney licences…

SQUEENIX: …and on the other, item management, magic and summons, as you'd expect from Square.

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation2

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Buena Vista Games

DEVELOPER
Square Enix

PRICE
¥7,770

RELEASE
TBA (Japan: Out Now)

PLAYERS
1

KINGDOM HEARTS II

WELCOME TO THE TOON TOWN PARTY

Ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls, welcome to the grand unveiling of the technique known as the 'Reverse *MGS2*'. While Kojima's stealth silliness gives the player a brief taste of the hero they know and love, before taking Snake away and replacing him with a floppy-haired buffoon, *Kingdom Hearts II* flip reverses this concept. After the simply stunning intro movie, you're dropped into the oversized shoes of new boy Roxas. He's not Sora. But technically, he is. Sort of. Let's just say his existence ties into the ending of the first game, so if you haven't finished the original – or indeed played the GBA game – you might want to start doing your research…

In a slightly strange move on the part of Square Enix, a lot of storytelling has followed on from GBA spin-off *Chain Of Memories*. If you didn't play the curious card-based title, you've missed out on a fair chunk of backstory, although with a little help from Wikipedia or one of any number of fan sites, you can clue yourself up in a fraction of the time. It's as though corners had to be cut somewhere along the line, and so rather than open *Kingdom Hearts II* with a slew of intros and recaps, it's just pretty much assumed that you know what's been going on – who Axel and those other shady chaps are and so on. A bit of a cop-out, perhaps, but it does mean, in theory, that the game can get going that bit quicker – an opportunity upon which it fails entirely to capitalise. Like the first game, the lengthy intro/tutorial section takes the form of menial tasks. Thankfully, you don't have to run around collecting rope and wood this time. Instead, you take on errands, in the form of mini-games, to earn enough cash to enter the Struggle tournament. It does a good enough job of easing you into the game, and you get to hit Seifer with a padded club, so it can't be that bad.

"IT'S AS THOUGH CORNERS HAD TO BE CUT AND SO, RATHER THAN OPEN WITH A SLEW OF RECAPS, IT'S ASSUMED YOU KNOW WHAT'S BEEN GOING ON"

The first thing you notice when you start getting into *Kingdom Hearts II* is that the camera has been vastly improved. Tighter manual control helps out when things start to go a bit screwy (which they invariably do at times), but for the most part, things are as polished as you could hope. In fact, the whole game just feels that much smoother than the original – closer control, the inclusion of new Reaction Commands and a revised magic system make every second a joy. Draining your MP is far from a disaster – whether you abuse quick and easy combo spells, or use a big spell or team attack, a depleted gauge blinks red for 30 seconds or so before restoring itself to full charge. With Cure being one such spell that uses an entire bar (to prevent spamming on it during boss battles), you'll never permanently run out as you traverse the many worlds. You will have to ration magic use when in the thick of the action, though.

While it starts out with a rather familiar-feeling trawl of simple-themed worlds, it isn't until the latter stages of the game that even your party gets into the spirit of a new location. Seeing Sora, ▷

■ In true *Kindom Hearts* style, you'll get to visit plenty of awesome Disney-themed lands.

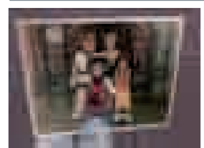




TIMELINE HIGHLIGHTS

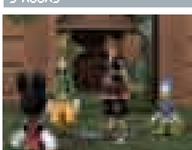
THE BEST BITS IN THE GAME AND WHEN YOU CAN EXPECT TO SEE THEM

15 mins



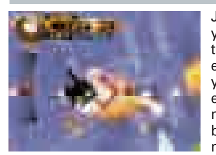
Look, just stop resetting your console and watching that intro over and over. Get on with the game. You won't regret it. Oh, go on then – just one more time…

3 hours



With Donald and Goofy now by your side, it's definitely game on – those strangely approachable Nobody and the teeming Heartless don't stand a chance.

3 days



Just when you think your Disney round trip is drawing to an end, you hear that you need to return to every world for even more missions and big fights. Will it never end?

WHO DID THE WHAT NOW?

So you don't know Japanese, but you really want to import *Kingdom Hearts II*? Go for it. If you have any knowledge of the first game (which is pretty much a given if you're considering importing the sequel), menus and such are a cinch to navigate. The only thing you're really going to miss out on are the finer details of the story. The game's Disney ties mean that everything is larger than life to the point of being self-explanatory even in a foreign tongue – in this case, actions speak far louder than words, as everything you need to do is spelled out through body language and camera work. If you're looking to do everything the game has to offer, hold out for a US release, but if you simply want to taste the action RPG goodness today, we wouldn't advise against it.



As usual, Lock, Shock and Barrel get up to mischief, causing you to run around and fix things for hours. It truly is RPG heaven.

Goofy and Donald change forms to fit in with their surroundings is a joy and if, like us, you've been unable to avoid the barrage of new media over the last few months, the chances are you'll have seen most of these already. It's actually seeing them in motion and learning how they affect the gameplay, though, which is something else. Lion cub Sora, for instance, wields his Keyblade in his mouth and tears around at breakneck speed while Halloween Town Sora… well, he just looks brilliant. But that's enough sometimes. Once the game gets into its stride, even familiar locales hide plenty of new secrets and surprises. The Hundred Acre Wood is still a collection of mini-games bound together by a suitably tenuous narrative, Atlantica is a series of simple rhythm action challenges, and while most of the other worlds play out quite similarly, there's a wealth of extra tasks, goals and sub-quests in each to keep things varied. And that's before you shoot off into space.

It's unbelievable to see how far the Gummi Ship intermissions have developed into a game in their own right. While the ship construction elements have, as you'd expect, been built up, multiple missions on each of the numerous space levels (each with rankings for certain criteria and a spread of prizes for more skilled pilots to enjoy) play out almost exactly like *Lylat Wars*, a vast improvement on the pathetic levels from the original *Kingdom Hearts*. We found ourselves losing hours to this section of the game alone, desperately trying to create the right ship for each stage in order to grab every piece of swag available. With each elusive S-grade performance comes another secret Gummi Ship based on a familiar character or theme. They're damned hard to get and often pretty pointless, but they're nothing if not great fun to unlock and try out – it's just a bit of fun between levels, but it couldn't work better in such a capacity.

"A GREAT TITLE, MADE BETTER STILL BY THE INCLUSION OF SOME OF THE MOST MEMORABLE FACES AND PLACES FROM THE WORLD OF ENTERTAINMENT"

Of course, there are just so many jaw-dropping moments that it's pretty much impossible to know where to begin. Even within the first few slow hours, there are a handful of standout events that make you delighted to have imported Square Enix's most anticipated title in years. The first couple of boss fights really showcase how much better than its forerunner *Kingdom Hearts II* is, and you'll find yourself calling all and sundry in to see how the beautiful action pans out. Big battles feel closer to *God Of War* or *Devil May Cry* than they do to the original game, and although the combat here is far simpler than in both these titles, what it lacks in depth it more than makes up for with style, polish and scale. This comes to a point when you realise that the bit in the trailer where Sora is surrounded by thousands of Heartless isn't just some showy cut-scene. You really do have to slice your way through an ocean of enemies in one of the most intense moments

FOLLOW ME: The new camera is better than the one in *Kingdom Hearts*, whatever the haters say.

WORK TO DO: Jobs, quests and mini-games fill the themed worlds; there's always plenty to do.



YOU DRIVE ME CRAZY

In one of the many tweaks that makes *Kingdom Hearts II* a more accomplished game than its predecessor, the Trinity Moves have been replaced with Drive Forms. These allow Sora to merge with either Donald or Goofy (or, later, both) to take on their powers. Brave Form joins with Goofy to greatly increase attack power while dual wielding Keyblades; Wisdom Form uses Donald's magic to glide about the floor and fire projectiles rather than swinging your blade; and Master Form draws in the two partners to boost both aspects of Sora's character. There are a couple more forms tucked away in there too, but we'll leave those for you to discover. You sure as hell won't be disappointed.



Getting attacked by an angry Stitch is top of our ever-growing 'Ways In Which We Want To Die' list.



The combat works well throughout. When is hitting things with a big key not fun? Never, that's when.

that game throws your way.

Undeniably gorgeous throughout, *Kingdom Hearts II* is a simple action RPG that combines rock-solid gameplay with a lovable cast to great effect. There's little depth to the flashy combat, beyond enabling new abilities that improve your combos and the odd reaction press of the Triangle button, but it doesn't matter – there's enough substance offered by magic, summons and form-changes to keep the action from feeling like a cheap button masher. It's compelling, beautiful and, above all, great fun. The fan service has been unashamedly piled on and if you're even slightly interested in either Disney's catalogue or the *Final Fantasy* series, you'll discover at least a couple of moments that'll bring a Cheshire cat grin to your face. Even the coldest heart couldn't fail to be warmed by the stylised genius of *Timeless River* while stalwart fans of the world's most renowned animation studio will flip out with glee at every single second of the game. Square Enix has created a great title in its own right, made better still by the inclusion of some of the most memorable and popular faces and places from the world of entertainment.

You could, perhaps, bemoan the slightly weak integration of Square and Disney characters and stories into the original narrative, or complain about the simplicity of the combat mechanics. Maybe criticise the camera if you're looking for areas to mark a good game down on. But there's no benefit to such nitpicking. *Kingdom Hearts II* is a simply marvelous game and deserves to be recognised as such.



VERDICT 8/10

STUNNING, FEATURE-PACKED AND UTTERLY WONDERFUL

FAQs

Q. SO IT'S PRETTY LONG THEN?
Hell yeah. There are a lot of cut-scenes in there, but even so, it's a good 50 hours of game. Plus extras…

Q. EXTRAS?
Unlocking all the Gummi Ships, alone, takes mad skills and leveling up to defeat Sephiroth will take you a good few hours.

Q. IMPORT FRIENDLY?
Yes and no. Menus, quests and simple action aren't a problem. However, unless your Japanese is up to scratch, you'll miss out on the epic story.





All the charm of the N64 game, but with rather more portability.



Apparently, Linda went and got her name changed by deed poll.



Build up that trick meter and you'll be blocking attacks in no time.

THE COLLEGE YEARS

SBK: SNOWBOARD KIDS

DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
Nintendo DS

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Atlus

DEVELOPER
In-House

PRICE
$39.99

RELEASE
March '06
(Japan/US: Out Now)

PLAYERS
1-4

For a large part of the DS-owning population, *Snowboard Kids* will bring back very fond memories. The first N64 game (and slightly less awesome second one) in this series enjoyed a cult following back in 1997. Of course, that was a long time ago. The Snowboard Kids have since grown up; they've become Snowboard Teens and have ended up with that trendy new *'SBK'* nomenclature. There's been a bit of a character shuffle (Linda appears to have turned into Nancy in some bizarre mis-translation somewhere along the way, and Jam's somehow turned black since the first game), a complete change in the power-up system and, naturally, the inclusion of touch screen elements. After so many years and so many changes, we were a little anxious that the game would not hold together.

It didn't help that upon first playing *Snowboard Kids* DS it appeared to be a bit of a mess. Now though, characters no longer pick up projectiles; they have them automatically. They also have considerable automatic homing capabilities which means that aiming and timing shots is no longer that relevant. With no way to avoid projectiles, it seemed like we were being blown up every five seconds, and the initial awkwardness of the controls meant that we were fumbling tricks and tumbling over in the snow far more than we felt we should be. Although the touch screen commands for special tricks work well, the microphone elements are unbelievably spurious, requiring you to blow fog away or shout to wake up your stunned character in the middle of a tense race, in an irritating and unnecessary fashion.



After our first few races, though, the love begins to shine through. Once the controls make sense and the realisation dawns that you can deflect projectiles using well-timed spin tricks, *Snowboard Kids* becomes both a considerably skilled game and a rollicking good laugh. Because everyone can charge up and use shots, the game's more balanced; no one's at a disadvantage because no one has projectiles. And although the microphone elements remain really, really stupid, they prove only a minor irritation due to their relative infrequency. The courses are challenging, the characters are well-balanced and the speeds are satisfying. It's not quite as good as we might have liked – online play would have been nice, as would a challenge mode in the vein of *Mario Kart DS* – but this is a cheerful snowboarding game which, once mastered, provides a great deal of wintry entertainment.



VERDICT 7/10
FAST, FRANTIC FUN

BETTER THAN



RIDGE RACER DS

WORSE THAN

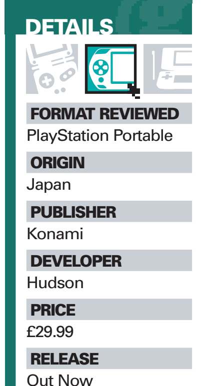


MARIO KART DS


eMag

FALL OF THE MACHINES

RENGOKU: TOWER OF PURGATORY



DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation Portable

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Konami

DEVELOPER
Hudson

PRICE
£29.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1-4

Questioning the meaning of life is one of those things that just has to be attempted at some point. You'll inevitably fail to reach an adequate conclusion, but it's just as likely that whatever you do come up with will never be as foolish as attempting to create a PSP game about it that features robots in a big tower.

You take control of A.D.A.M., a fighting robot who's been thrown into a tower full of other damaged bots, to battle for all eternity. He finds himself questioning his existence and so decides to fight his way to the top in order to find out why he's 'alive'.

The bottom line is that *Rengoku* is tedium at its finest. For all the attempts to make this an emotional and thought-provoking tale, it barely manages to crawl clear of the horrific car crash that is its gameplay. Moving from room to room – each decorated in one of many shades of dull – you are to use whatever means necessary to clear the area of enemies and make your way to the next. You pass slowly through the entire floor until you reach the lift that takes you up to the next level that comes complete with boss.

Now, when you're working with cybernetic fighters, and have famously dark Japanese illustrator Jun Suemi working on character design, you'd expect the boss milestones to be something to look forward to. Alas, no. The bosses look much like all the other enemies you've faced but with ten inches worth of life bar. We all know that the PlayStation Portable screen isn't actually that big, but that's exactly how long the life bar feels when you're desperately attempting to whittle it down.



An insipid, ambling sci-fi game that parades itself as an original PSP title.

games™ FINGERPRINT

WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE

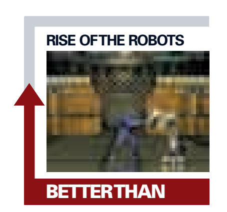
GOOD READ: We've never heard of a game being inspired by Dante's literary works before.

HEAD CASE: At one point we attached a gun to A.D.A.M.'s face – that was interesting.

In fact, this apparent bending of space and shape is arguably one of the most impressive aspects of the title.

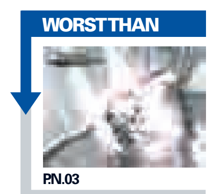
Somehow inspired by Dante's Purgatory Cantos, and with such talent on board, there really is no excuse for *Rengoku: Tower Of Purgatory* to be so drab. With combat relying on clever use of items and plenty of RPG-esque searching and equipping, *Rengoku* does show some potential, but it's far too little, and with so many better-quality titles already on the market, it's definitely too late.

RISE OF THE ROBOTS



BETTER THAN

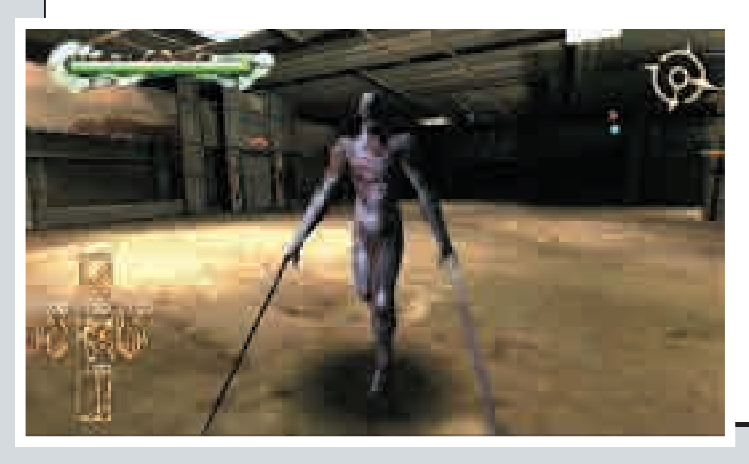
WORST THAN



P.N.03



VERDICT 3/10
CRUSHINGLY DULL






eMag

STUBBS THE ZOMBIE IN "REBEL WITHOUT A PULSE"

ZOMBIES ATE MY NEIGHBOURS

There are many things videogames do well. Action, tension, even fear – all part and parcel of many a successful videogame experience. Comedy, on the other hand, is a much trickier prospect for games, certainly outside the traditional confines of the point-and-click genre. Still, there are a few exceptions to every rule, and *Stubbs The Zombie* is certainly one of them. After the initial barrage of slightly worrying dick and fart jokes dissipates, what remains is a highly witty affair fuelled by superb voice acting and sound bites.

Any game that forces the player to pause play due to laughter is doing something right, and *Stubbs*' jet-packed barbershop quartet SWAT team elicits that reaction within seconds of their first appearance. Accompanied by a cop/zombie dance-off, a barrage of imperiously delivered one-liners and a general air of mischief and irreverence, *Rebel Without A Pulse* is a very appealing game, especially for those tired of typical gruff action fare. It's also thoroughly disgusting, simultaneously poking fun at the conventions of body horror and proving horrific in its own right. Stubbs' half-rotten torso (complete with exposed ribs and dangling entrails) and the camera's insistence on showing the optimum angle for brain removal will turn all but the strongest of stomachs, at least until the magic veil of desensitivity obscures the view.

At first, though, it's far from funny. As a lesson in how not to open a videogame, *Stubbs* should be dragged out at developer conferences for years to come. It begins with no backstory, no purpose, without access to Stubbs' key moves, and involves little more than plodding up to pedestrians and chomping their heads. It seems like a horribly gory exercise in complete futility as your zombie hordes vastly overpower terrified humans. But a few hours in and *Stubbs* sinks its decaying claws in and the core of the game starts to shine through. With each human brain consumed, another zombie joins your shambling party, it becomes a case of gradually overwhelming each group of humans in turn; picking off the weakest and most vulnerable, and building up an army powerful enough to rush the strongest. When it works, it's a surprisingly tactical experience, and watching your zombies rush a small group of citizens is quite superb.

However, due to occasional lacklustre level design and some gaps in zombie AI (if there is



DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
Xbox

ORIGIN
US

PUBLISHER
THQ

DEVELOPER
Wideload Games Inc.

PRICE
$49.99

RELEASE
February
(US: Out Now)

PLAYERS
1-2

FAQs

Q. HOW MANY ZOMBIES CAN I HAVE IN MY CREW?
Loads, but they have a tendency to wander off and do their own thing.

Q. BUT IS IT ACTUALLY FUNNY?
Ignore a couple of rubbish jokes at the beginning and you'll be in stitches.

Q. WHY DOES STUBBS SMOKE ALL THE TIME?
Because he's cool.

Remote control, via Stubbs' disembodied hand, can help you keep yourself safe.







It's a weird combination of futuristic cityscapes and Fifties styling, but *Stubbs The Zombie* has a unique charm all of its own.

DISMEMBERS ONLY

Part of Stubbs' charm is his ability to tear chunks from his own body and use them as weapons. He can use his spleen as a grenade (detonated with a second tug on the left trigger), and wrench his own head from his shoulders to bowl down the road at unsuspecting civilians. By far the most interesting of Stubbs' abilities, though, is his *Addams Family*-inspired dismembered hand, which can be used to reach otherwise inaccessible switches and buttons, and to possess humans. Attach yourself to a cop's head, blow away his team-mates with your magnum, and suddenly matters get a lot easier.



Stubbs throws some shapes on the dancefloor – most amusing.



With its tongue buried in its cheek, *Stubbs The Zombie* is to zombie flicks what *Destroy All Humans!* was to sci-fi.

such a thing), it often becomes a case of trial and error; determining the easiest route through a pack of humans, rather than acting on instinct. This leads to some unnecessary frustration, and lessens the replay value. As do the absurd difficulty spikes midway through, which force the player into a more tactical mindset but do it in such an obstinate and sudden way that it may put off the less patient.

Far less frustrating, however, is the vehicle integration. The city of Punchbowl is a bizarre simulacrum of 1950s America, complete with robots and hover cars. As such, controlling most vehicles will be second nature to anyone au fait with piloting a Ghost (it's built with the *Halo* engine, after all). Cruising around in a hover truck with a posse of zombies in the back is a really entertaining nod to Stubb's sci-fi cousin, as is mowing down innocents and admiring the exaggerated ragdoll inverse kinematics in full effect.

Stubbs is only really let down by the loftiness of its ideals. As a concept, it's excellent; original, clever and very witty. But in terms of execution, it's unashamedly flawed. While almost consistently entertaining, *Stubbs* is supremely limited in its gameplay. Sticking to your guns and remaining focused is admirable, but there are only so many times that eating a brain will be enjoyable, and when you're approaching four figures, the constant cerebellum chomping begins to lose its appeal.

As an exercise in videogame comedy, *Stubbs* is largely unchallenged. Casual observers will baulk at the Rockstar-esque fake names and camp overtones, but peel back the layers and there's a world of film parodies (the Patton pastiche is a particular standout), satire and laugh-out-loud absurdity that shines when put up against titles that many may consider more worthy. If anything, *Stubbs* deserves to succeed, just to prove to publishers and retailers that new IPs and obscure ideas aren't something to fear.

VERDICT 7/10

WITTY AND ENTERTAINING, BUT NOT LIFE-CHANGING

EVIL DEAD: HAIL TO THE KING

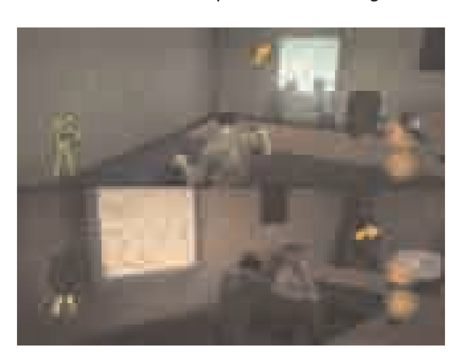


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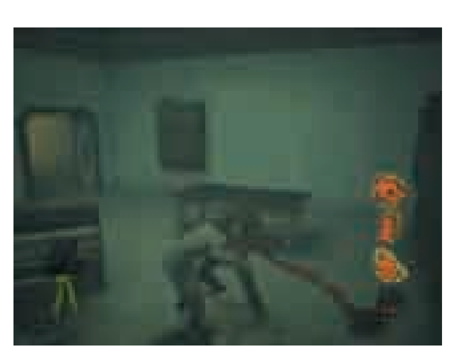
WORSE THAN



DESTROY ALL HUMANS!



Multiplayer jaunts require plenty of co-operation between players.



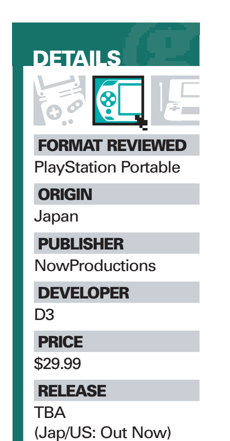
Considering the comedy value, the game really is quite graphic too.



Talk about a multi-talented zombie – Stubbs can even drive vehicles.

THAT'S THE SOUND OF YOUR BRAIN CRACKING

PQ: PRACTICAL INTELLIGENCE QUOTIENT



DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation Portable

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
NowProductions

DEVELOPER
D3

PRICE
$29.99

RELEASE
TBA
(Jap/US: Out Now)

PLAYERS
1

***PQ* is an odd little title.** A supremely simple concept wrapped up in a strong visual style and the pretence that playing the game will provide an actual measure of one's intelligence.

In reality, it's a very difficult puzzle game that regularly flits between moments of genius and mind-numbing boredom, and every stage in between. Each of *PQ*'s 100 levels is a challenge of logic and lateral thinking represented by an abstract obstacle course, comprising basic block-pushing tasks, switch manipulation and the occasional piece of videogame dexterity.

While it might sound like the world's most boring videogame, it is in fact thoroughly entertaining and challenging, especially during the opening few stages. It doesn't take long before *PQ* begins to genuinely test the grey matter, and there's a definite satisfaction to conquering its very strict logic. However, after 40 or so levels, the game's difficulty takes a turn for the worse, and it often resorts to forcing tiresome, elongated sessions of block-lifting and trudging back and forth through the *Rez*-inspired rooms.

Despite this descent into frustration, doubtless many will persevere with *PQ* just to see where they rank in the global Practical Intelligence Quotient standings. After clearing the ten stages (each consisting of ten levels or 'questions', as they're called), the game calculates a number – your 'PQ' – which is dependent on how quickly and efficiently the levels are cleared, and the amount of fails and passes the player has on his or her copybook. Cleverly, using the PSP's Wi-Fi infrastructure, this number can be uploaded to the Global PQ website and we can see who the cleverest gamer in all the world really is. It's like the exact opposite of a game of Big Team Battle on *Halo 2 Live*, itself seemingly a system for capturing the world's most ignorant and idiotic human specimens.

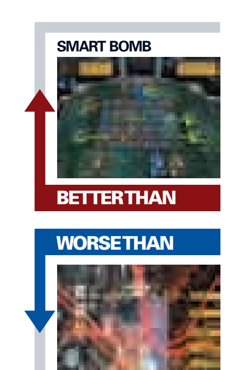


games™ FINGERPRINT
WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE
REZ-ONANCE: A whole load of purple, dance music and wireframes.
MY... BRAIN...: Be warned. Extended *PQ* play = splitting headache.

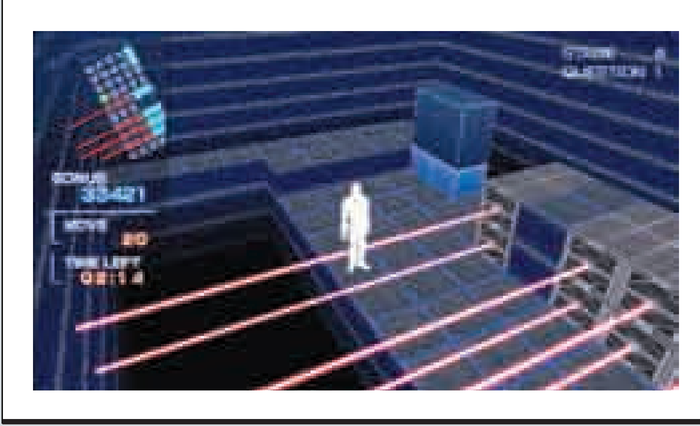
Undoubtedly, *PQ: Practical Intelligence Quotient* is an enjoyable and taxing puzzler, and when played in short doses will provide PSP owners with many months of head scratching before all 100 'questions' are conquered. It sometimes feels more like a boring school lesson than a videogame, but when it clicks it's like being stuck in the middle of some wonderful *Crystal Maze/Krypton Factor* hybrid. Which is never a bad thing.



VERDICT 6/10
ANOTHER WORTHWHILE ORIGINAL PSP TITLE



SMART BOMB
BETTER THAN
WORSE THAN
LUMINES






eMag



'What's going on here?' Your guess is as good as ours, we're afraid.



The Rub Rabbits! may very well rub *you* up the wrong way.



You see, she's going to drown in her own tears. There's a lesson to be learned here.

games™ CONNECTED

EXPANDING THE GAMEPLAY

LET'S TWIST AGAIN: Hullabaloo mode allows for an infinite number of players.

WHY-FI?: Trick your friends into playing wirelessly with you.

"WHAT IS LOVE? BABY DON'T HURT ME"

THE RUB RABBITS!

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
Nintendo DS

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Sega

DEVELOPER
In-House

PRICE
£29.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1-4

Love is a funny thing. The absolute staple diet of the cinema, yet almost completely ignored when it comes to videogames. After completing *The Rub Rabbits'* excruciating Rub Comedy, we'd be inclined to suggest that it should stay that way. About as romantic as a brick in the face, this tale of a horribly needy girl and her long-suffering suitor is patronising, sexist, and most importantly, very little fun to play.

As a novelty upon the DS's launch, the original *Feel The Magic* game was well received and rightly so. As a tool for showing off the unique capabilities of the DS to one's peers, the mix of rubbing, shouting, blowing and drawing was excellent and thoroughly worthy. A year on, however, and the novelty of the DS has worn off somewhat. The touch screen is now just another method of input and, as such, a compendium of weak mini-games will no longer cut it as quality entertainment.

The story itself, although entirely insane and extremely Japanese, attempts to push the same buttons as a Sandra Bullock rom com – appealing to the softer side of our nature and depicting a puppy dog type of love which will have some retching and others cooing at its sweetness. However, it's about as sophisticated as an Etch-A-Sketch, and instead of making one feel loved-up and warm inside, it fills the player with an uncontrollable rage. What's more, the mini-games suffer due to the inaccuracy of the touch screen, lacklustre design, and sound effects that are more annoying than Joe Pasquale. It's the videogaming equivalent of switching on your mobile and finding 37 missed calls from your girlfriend, all within the space of 20 minutes.

The Rub Rabbit's saving grace comes in the form of the highly amusing Hullabaloo mode. Essentially the DS's version of Twister, it's theoretically possible to have an infinite number of players passing the DS between them, each holding a combination of buttons, then releasing as the next player joins in. It's just a novelty, but is nevertheless superbly entertaining, and a very inventive way of utilising a handheld machine.

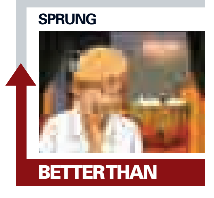
Aside from this, there's very little reason to recommend *The Rub Rabbits*, unless you think that blowing at a console is the pinnacle of interactive entertainment.



VERDICT 3/10

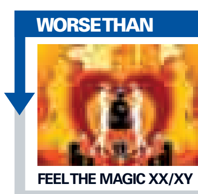
A PATRONISING AND DULL ATTEMPT AT A VIDEOGAME

SPRUNG



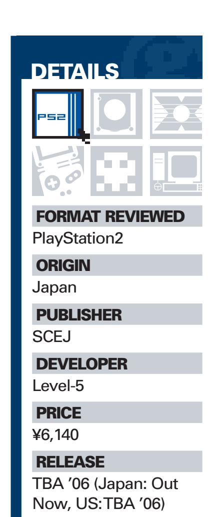
BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



FEEL THE MAGIC XX/XY


eMag



DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation2

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
SCEJ

DEVELOPER
Level-5

PRICE
¥6,140

RELEASE
TBA '06 (Japan: Out Now, US:TBA '06)

PLAYERS
1

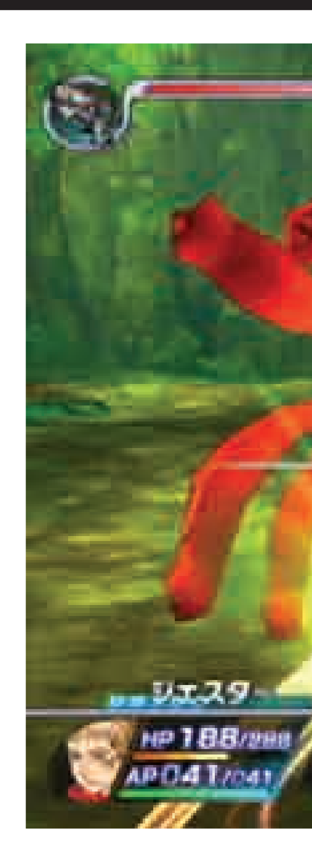
ROGUE GALAXY

PIRATES IN SPACE. IT CAN'T NOT WORK, PEOPLE

There's as much to say about *Rogue Galaxy* as there is not to say about it. The easiest way around it is to say that the game exhibits the most gorgeous, virtuous character and dungeon design of probably any title conceived and produced since the Nintendo Famicom era. It looks and sounds so wonderful that you'd expect it to have been the product of a movie studio with too much money, not some tiny development house – the illustrious up-and-coming Level-5 – in southern Japan. On the other hand, the game, in all its visual brilliance, represents an enormous risk for publisher Sony Computer Entertainment – mainly because it doesn't have Mickey Mouse and *Final Fantasy VII*'s Sephiroth in it.

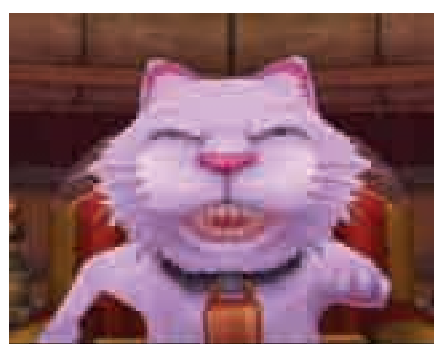
With many hardcore Japanese gaming fans insisting that the *Final Fantasy* series is 'doomed' now that Hironobu Sakaguchi has formed his own developer and is busy on *Blue Dragon* and *Lost Odyssey* for Xbox 360, *Rogue Galaxy* stands as Sony's last hope of an original hit RPG franchise. It represents a stab at a new era. It's gorgeous. Oh, the seamless worlds you'll explore, the details of the dungeons you'll delve into, the glory of the starlight as seen from the picture windows on your space pirate ship bridge – the interior glows as though by firelight, and the wooden floorboards and crimson carpets sound hollow beneath your feet… and all with no loading times, even when you enter a building.

Ostensibly, it's a game about a young boy named Jester Rogue, a part-time hunter in a city on a nondescript desert planet, who's faced by a crisis. A mysterious man appears, helps him fight some beasts, gives him a sword, and then runs away. Two weirdo robots find Jester and conclude that he's the famous 'Desert Claw', for whom their pirate captain has sent them to search. Jester tries to resist their invitation and tells them that they have the wrong guy; in the end, his dream to explore the galaxy gets the better of him, and so begins a huge, swashbuckling adventure complete with explosions, pirate ship-shaped spaceships, lavish cities on gargantuan planets, cavernous dungeons as big as entire games, and a cast of characters that includes robots, aliens, hardcore pirates (Zegram is easily the wicked-coolest character in the game), Amazonian warriors, ex-computer-hackers, and a very cute girl, all voiced by famous Japanese actors.





Don't look so surprised… in space, purple cats with sharp teeth and silly voices are allowed to be the captains of pirate ships. It's true.





If you thought that Level-5's work on *Dragon Quest VIII*'s environments was special, you really haven't seen anything yet.





"IT LOOKS AND SOUNDS SO WONDERFUL THAT YOU'D EXPECT IT TO HAVE BEEN THE PRODUCT OF A MOVIE STUDIO, NOT SOME TINY DEVELOPMENT HOUSE"

games™ FUSED

BRINGING GENRES TOGETHER

CARTOON GOODNESS: Who said graphics couldn't get better than *Dragon Quest VIII*?

TRIPLE THE FUN: It's a dungeon-crawler RPG with hard action – and platforming that actually works.

The story unfolds just for the sake of unfolding. It's best to call it a yarn. And a yarn is only as good as the characters knitting it. This is perhaps the most valuable lesson Level-5 has learned from *Dragon Quest VIII*. Progressing the game just to see the characters talking has never felt more fun.

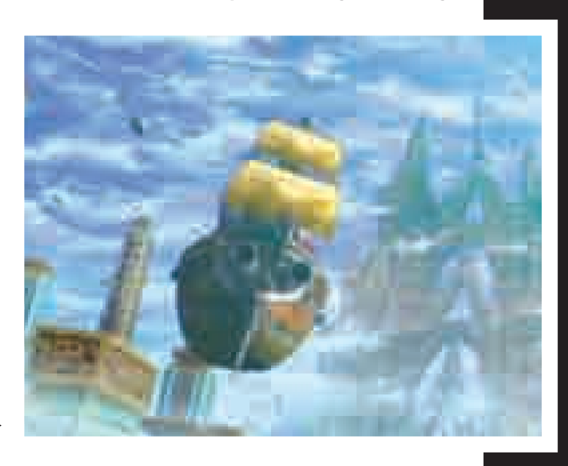
If there's anything wrong with the game, it might be the off-putting difficulty. The fighting is action based and sometimes very rough. It's not the fighting itself that's rough, it's the stocking of items. In the first big dungeon, trapped beneath the surface of a planet for six hours fighting giant robot spiders and searching for the keys in sets of four eight-storey towers, you'll long to see the sun, and spend all of your money on potions from the elusive wandering merchants. Sometimes you'll have to run away from battles. Sometimes you'll penetrate deep into the core of a dungeon only to find that you've been going the wrong way, and when you double back, you'll get ambushed, die, and lose all that time. Luckily, later in the game, the teleporters (also your save points) allow you to warp out of the dungeons and into the cities, which is great because that means you can go to item shops.

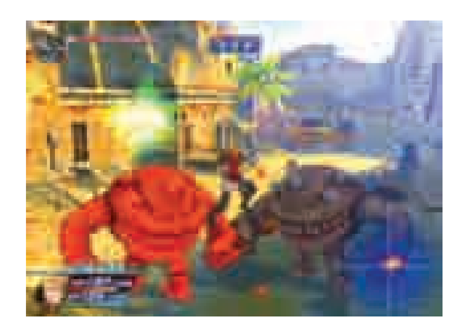
That's the game's progression: story, dungeon, story, dungeon, story, next planet, repeat. You end up going back to planets you've been to before, and unlocking new areas, and by the end, some of those earlier planets even feel kind of nostalgic. It's the progression for progression's sake that puts the game at a risk, but the risk pays off; playing (or rather, battling) is uniquely fun. It's brisker than in *Dark Chronicle*, and the attacks have more oomph to them. Ironically, it plays like a beefed-up, many-years-advanced version of the battle system playable in the *Final Fantasy XII* demo, but you don't need to control your fellow party members at all (though it is possible). Whenever they want to use a special technique or item, they'll ask your permission. Press the L1 or L2 buttons while the questions are visible on screen to say yes. Press L3 to say no. Attack, attack, jump, sometimes initiate nine-hit combos (played like a rhythm game) and sometimes stand back and pick enemies off with your gun.

The flow is fantastic and crispy. This system is unique because though the battles are random, the enemies kind of pop out of reasonable places, and right there on the dungeon path at that. You might be progressing down a corridor, get into a fight, and end up pushed back a few tens of meters in the process of winning the battle. Once the battle's over, you have to get your bearings straight. Though ▷

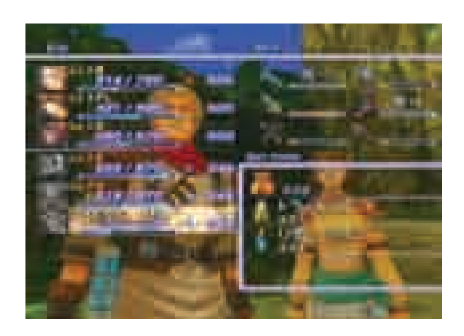
ONCE UPON A TIME IN SPACE…

You don't actually control your pirate spaceship; your robot friend Steve does all the piloting – robots are more trustworthy with explosive devices than swashbuckling kids, at any rate – although your captain is a little white cat. Anyway, you set your course and watch as the little star-chart in the bottom right-hand corner progresses slowly (sometimes very slowly) toward your goal. All you can do now is wander the ship, talking to your team-mates; have enthralling conversations with a pirate; and witness moments of quiet, purple space beauty on the deck with the girl. This game is all about the feeling. What a heck of a laid-back way to break up the sprints of dungeon hacking.









"THE QUESTION IS WILL ENOUGH PEOPLE GET HOOKED ON ROGUE GALAXY? IN THIS NEXT GENERATION OF VIDEOGAMES, BEING TOO ORIGINAL IS A CURSE, ESPECIALLY IN AN EXISTING GENRE"

FAQs

Q. SO IT'S LIKE DRAGON QUEST VIII IN SPACE?
Yes and no. It's an action RPG. With a long, long quest.

Q. HOW LONG IS IT THIS TIME?
Maybe 60 hours. If you play the optional modes, you're looking at quite a bit more.

Q. IS THE COMBAT ACTUALLY INTERESTING?
Yes. *Dark Chronicle's* meandering, randomly generated dungeons and hack-and-wait slow-paced battles have definitely been fixed.

sometimes mystifying, it feels oddly real and punchy. Seeing as the dungeons rely mostly on spatial perception (the eight-storey chambers mentioned above only have two exits – one going forward, the other going back – treasures on each floor, and bridges all around) and remembering where you are, the battles can only be intentionally disorientating.

As in *Dark Chronicle*, you level up everything – though it does feel better this time. Weapons gain elemental properties from battling certain enemies, garnering skill points from whacking things. Level up a weapon, and then feed it (and another maxed weapon) to your purple space frog, and he'll spit out a new weapon of composite powers. The weapons only need to be of the same class. Feed a combined weapon and an un-combined weapon or a magic stone of special properties to the frog, and you'll get yet another weapon. The results are nearly endless and the welcome simplicity of it (just feed two weapons to the frog, as opposed to using all kinds of weird little systems) is refreshing.

The question, though, is will enough people get hooked on this game? Will enough players get the sense of not wanting to stop? Sadly, in this next generation of videogames, being too original is a curse, especially in an existing genre. *Rogue Galaxy's* quirky problem is that it doesn't star any Disney or *Final Fantasy* characters, and is therefore not expected to sell so well. It's almost thrilling that people have grown this

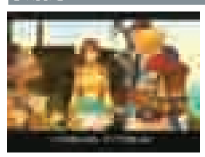


Hanging out with pirates can be bad for your reputation, so it's probably not a good idea to go propositioning any ladies you come across. Unless they like swords.

24:00 TIMELINE HIGHLIGHTS

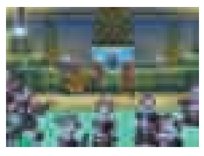
THE BEST BITS IN THE GAME AND WHEN YOU CAN EXPECT TO SEE THEM

3 HOURS



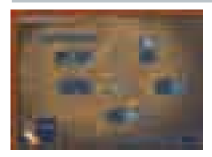
After going into outer space, meeting the characters, and crashing on a jungle planet, you'll find yourself running headlong into your first big scavenging adventure.

7 HOURS



You've been arrested, imprisoned, and are breaking out. For four hours. Then, after not saving, you die. You have never played a harder game in your life. You scream.

10 DAYS



And you're still playing. Collecting insects, winning mini-game tournaments, commanding your interstellar pirate ship. You are the pirate master, and don't want it to end.



■ Exploring the galaxy isn't nearly as hard as it looks, it's exploring the planets that poses the real danger.



shallow. Sure, some Japanese internet forums are picking up on *Rogue's* bugs (like on the rare occasion when enemies are knocked outside the range of the battlefield, resulting in your being prompted to run away if you try to engage them, leaving you to just stand and wait for them to come back), which are pretty plentiful, though that's being a bit harsh. The game has guts, and its instruction manual opens with a letter from the producer, begging us to remember the last time a game sucked us in and forced us to play until sunrise.

Akihiro Hino wants *Rogue Galaxy* to be that game. And while he's certainly crafted the best, most sprawling action-RPG hack-fest of his career, he has just a little way to go before he makes his *Dragon Quest V*, which is all right. We'll support him for now, and watch him grow, like another captured insect or forged weapon. After all, even Yuji Horii didn't make a perfect game with *Dragon Quest* – it took him four sequels. Hino has his team: his brilliant artist, his amazing composer, his plucky writer, and he's promised, in print, to never ever let them slack off. Their next game will be for the PlayStation3 and will likely be a masterpiece. Why not jump in at the ground level with this near-flawless, huge, heartfelt game? Come on – it's got pirates in space, for crying out loud.







games™ FINGERPRINT

WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE

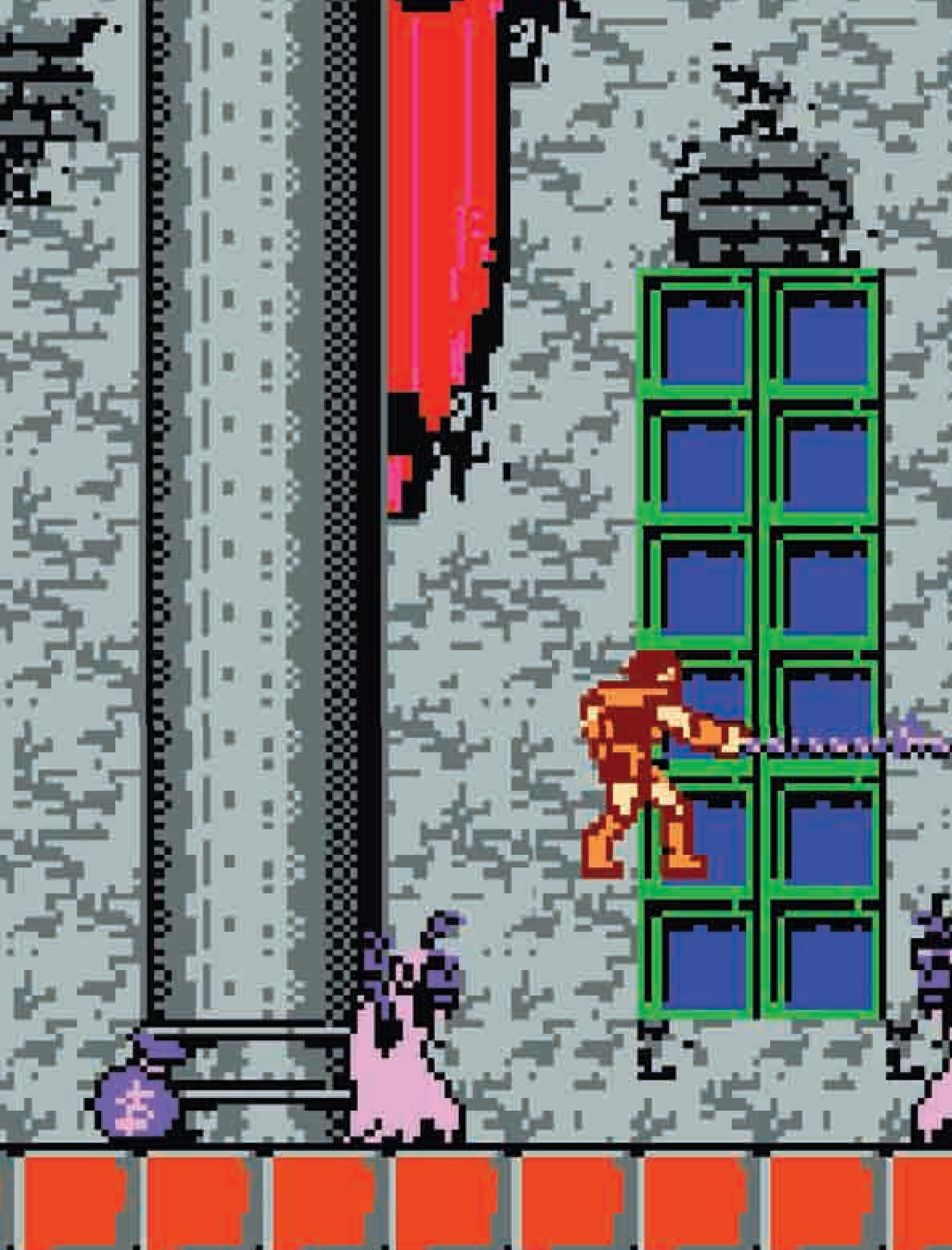
SKILLS GET!: The game's gigantic skills menu will take you an age to complete – it's just huge.

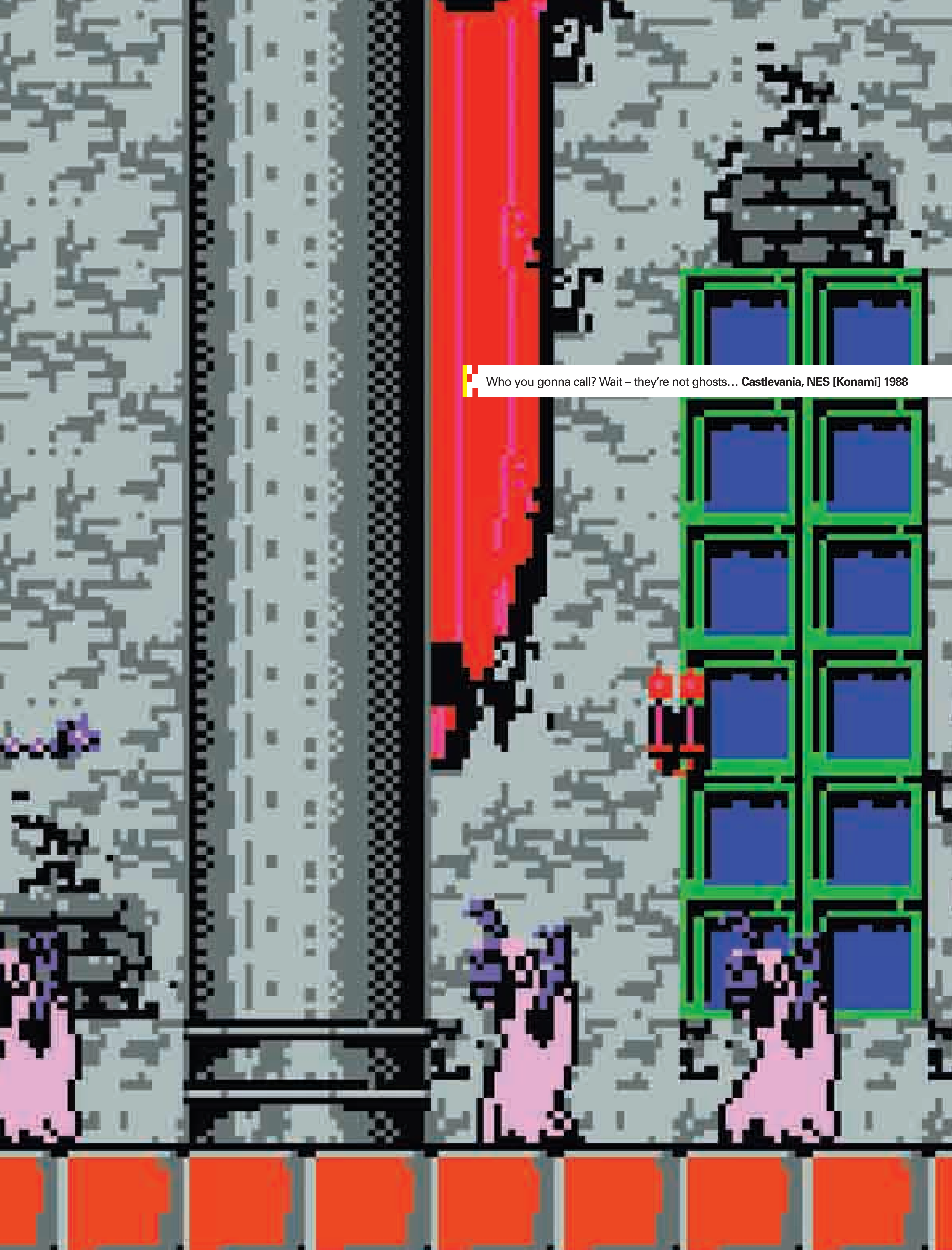
SHIP AHOY: Pirates are brilliant, as *Skies Of Arcadia* proved. Except *Rogue Galaxy* does it better.

■ Each planet you visit is home to its own unique inhabitants. Knowing how to interact with each race is part of the challenge.

BUGGING OUT

Dig deep enough into *Rogue Galaxy* and you'll find a major mini-game called Insectron, a combination of Checkers and *Advance Wars* starring little insects that you capture here and there. It's quite simple and amazingly deep; better-thought-out than any of the card games – or Blitzball in *Final Fantasy*, to be honest. They have interplanetary rankings for it, and various decadent arenas. You can even level up the insects you use, just like you can other items in the game, leaving you to spend more time focusing on your beetle battlers than you might actually, you know… questing. Get too hooked on it, and you might never stop.





Who you gonna call? Wait – they're not ghosts… **Castlevania, NES [Konami] 1988**

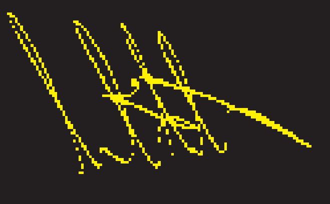

eMag


RETRO
MICRO GAMES ACTIO
A IMAGINE PUBLICATION
NO.41 FEB 2006
00p
GREATEST GAME EVER
ALEX KIDD
ANTS IN THE PANTS!
Why won't Rare remake Jet Force Gemini?
THE RESULTS START HERE...
TOP 100 RETRO GAMES EVER!
PLUS
RETRO NEWS, GREAT RETRO MOMENT, BUYERS' GUIDE, GREAT GAME BOSS, GAMES THAT TIME FORGOT, AND MUCH MORE...
THE RETRO BALL
If you didn't attend, you missed out on a treat
TURRICAN II
Who needs side-scrolling shooting when you can simply fly?

RETRO NEWS

Find out what's going on in the here and now of retro gaming

So, there's probably one thing I should make absolutely clear, a thing that seems to have caused some confusion – I'm not the new Retro Editor. If I was, it'd mean a ton more work on top of my usual Editor-type duties and I suspect that would bring my planned mid-life crisis on several years ahead of its time (I don't think I'll look truly good in lepoard-skin trousers until I'm at least 40, after all). No, I'm afraid my appearance here is merely to hide a more sinister truth… that we've hired a Retro Kendall instead. Yes, it's true. Naturally, the criteria for getting the job of Retro Kendall is pretty narrow (you have to be called Kendall, for a start) but nevertheless, the search has proven successful and so it's with great happiness, respect and just a little bit of jumping around that I introduce you to Kendall 'Older Than Darran Jones' Lacey. Being older obviously means that he knows more (that goes without saying) and as he's also quite a bit thinner, it means he takes up less space when we pack him away in the cupboard for the night… so that's a win all round really. Mr Lacey will be finding his feet over the next few months, but hopefully you'll enjoy what he has to offer – we know that we do.



Martin Mathers, Editor

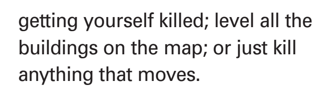
A WAR GAME FOR YOUR MOBILE PHONE. DOES IT GET MUCH BETTER THAN THIS?

CANNON FODDER RETURNS

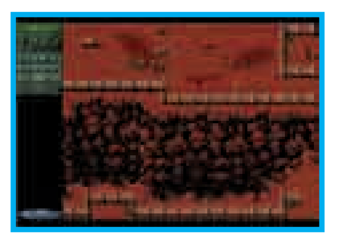
Many arcade classics have recently been resurrected for mobile phones, but now Codemasters has brought back one of the Amiga's greatest hits. *Cannon Fodder* is available for Symbian smartphones, and can be downloaded right now.

The new incarnation reproduces the original at 50 frames per second and uses truetone technology to replicate the soundtrack perfectly. The phone version offers four scenarios featuring over 70 levels of chaotic action, all of which are fairly faithful to the original.

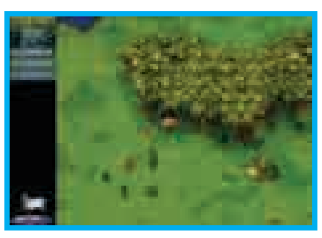
For anyone who has been living in a dark, damp cave for the last decade, though, *Cannon Fodder* is a war game that changes the rules by getting rid of slow-stealth tactical play and instead focusses on just putting a bomb under anything and anyone who gets in your way. Guiding a quartet of soldiers, you traverse the levels, getting one over on any armies stupid enough to stand in your path. Imagine *Worms* military style, and with the same sort of humour and addictive qualities. Missions are simple: get from point A to point B without getting yourself killed; level all the buildings on the map; or just kill anything that moves.



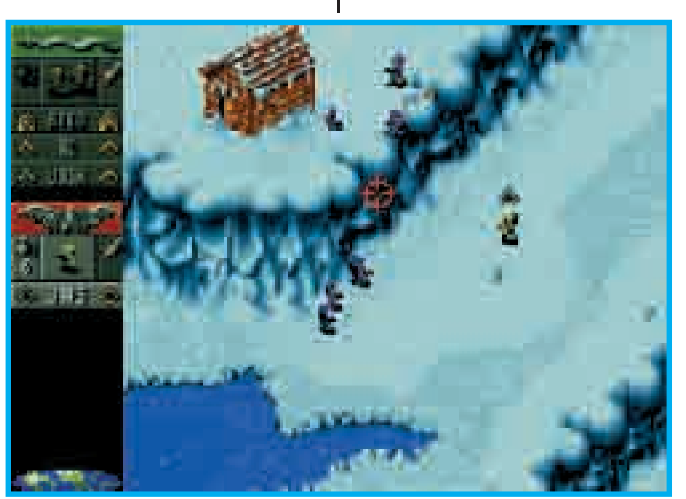
Despite the ease of use, there's a huge amount of hardware at your disposal in *Cannon Fodder*. Vehicles such as tanks and helicopters help you to traverse the landscapes, and the weapons in the game range from simple grenades to devastating bazookas. *Cannon Fodder* still offers perfect, brainless gameplay that should work well on the move. We'd recommend getting hold of it – if you have a suitable phone, of course.



▲ Strategy first, shooting later – that's *Cannon Fodder*.



▲ There's nothing like the smell of napalm, is there?



▲ Surprisingly, the mobile version's action is quite close to that of the original – it even works, too.

RETRO READING

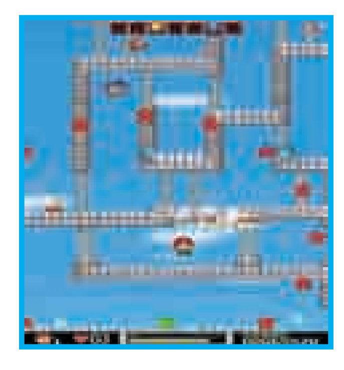
AN ESSENTIAL PIECE OF WRITING

Remember sitting in a smoky bar, playing *Asteroids*? Discovered the joys of *Space Invaders* through the magic of emulation? Then you'll want *Retro Gaming Hacks* by Chris Kohler. The book explains the best places to buy old machines as well as how to set them up and fix broken hardware. It also gives the best tips, including how to hack classic joysticks to use on new machines.

Discover how to create your own retro gaming experiences easily and effectively, and with the minimum of fuss; whether you're looking to invent a new masterpiece or merely play *Galaxians* on your new Mac, this book is an excellent resource for all things retro. Highly recommended.



▲ Yes, it might look like a harmless book, but inside is a whole host of gaming secrets for you to uncover. It's got to be worth a look, at least.





TOUCHING THE RAINBOW

WE'VE BEEN HERE BEFORE, HAVEN'T WE?

This month sees the return of one of Taito's finest franchises with the release of *Rainbow Islands Revolution* on the DS. Rather than just port the original classic, the entire control system has been overhauled so that the main characters, Bub and Bob, are now encased in a floating bubble that's dragged around the screen using the stylus. This isn't the only major change with the new version; the entire rainbow dynamic has been altered. Rainbows are now drawn straight onto the playing field and can be used to trap enemies.

While these additions might alter basic gameplay, the look of the game has been kept as close to the original as possible, with the bosses from the first game returning, along with those level endings where you collect bonus items galore. Player sprites have also been added. These have been designed by Igusa Matsuyama, famous for his work on *Harvest Moon*. Expect a review next issue.

Retro DIARY

As old-school gaming gets increasingly more popular, it's about time everyone knew about upcoming retro releases and events…

FEBRUARY '05

Breath Of Fire III

Date: 10 February **Publisher:** Capcom **Price:** £29.99 **Format:** PSP

We're suckers for classic RPGs and although Capcom's *Breath Of Fire III* isn't exactly old (it originally came out on the PSone in 1997), it's still good enough to warrant an inclusion here. There's even a new online game-sharing mode so you can play with friends – could Capcom be any more generous to us retro gamers, eh?

Castlevania Double Pack

Date: TBA **Publisher:** Konami **Price:** £TBA **Format:** GBA

Konami kicks off its new range of 'two games, one cartridge' packages in February with the release of some great Castlevania titles: *Harmony Of Dissonance* and *Aria Of Sorrow*. Yes, so they're relatively new but the gameplay is pure old-school harking back to the greatness of *Symphony Of The Night*… and that's most definitely a good thing. If you've never played through these before, you'd do well to pick it up.

Street Fighter Alpha 3 Max

Date: 24 February **Publisher:** Capcom **Price:** £29.99 **Format:** PSP

Alpha, Zero… it makes no difference to us what they call it any more. The bottom line is, we'll soon get to beat each other all over again at once of our favourite 2D beat-'em-ups, all thanks to Capcom's old-school dedication to the PSP. We just hope that the controls are up to it…

MARCH '06

Capcom Classics Collection Remixed

Date: TBA **Publisher:** Capcom **Price:** TBA **Format:** PSP

Look! Up there! It's a whole news piece on this, and yet you still want us to tell you more about it? You just want the moon on a stick, don't you? Well, there's not that much information right now, so we're kind of left dreaming instead – for instance, a Wi-Fi-enabled version of *Magic Sword* allowing for more than one player would go down incredibly well. Are you listening, Capcom… well, are you?

TO BE CONFIRMED '06

Extreme Ghosts 'N' Goblins

Date: TBA **Publisher:** Capcom **Price:** £29.99 **Format:** PSP

We're not sure if this is such a good idea for a remake, to be honest. *Ghosts 'N' Goblins* was ridiculously hard in its original form, so we can't imagine things being any different this time around… surely that's going to result in more than a few broken PSPs before the day is out? More than likely. Those with no gaming skills should steer well clear.

Sega's Treasure Box

Dates: TBA **Publisher:** Sega **Price:** TBA **Format:** PS2

Details are still sketchy but we can tell you that *Treasure Box* is set to include some of Treasure's greatest 16-bit moments. *Gunstar Heroes, Dynamite Headdy* and *Alien Soldier* have been confirmed, but we hope more games will be added. Hell, we'd give our neighbour's left kidney (ours is much to valuable) for Treasure's complete back catalogue on one shiny disc. Let's just hope Sega doesn't disappoint.

If you know of, or are hosting, any retro events, please contact the magazine's editor at gamestm@imagine-publishing.co.uk



HAVING A BALL…

A GATHERING LIKE NO OTHER, AND NOT A GLASS SLIPPER IN SIGHT. JAY SLATER, YOU SHALL GO TO THE BALL…

Retro Feature



▲ Dizzy in the hiz-owse – Philip Oliver gave his support to the event, talking to those in attendence.

Kenilworth, Warwickshire, in the first weekend of December games™ found itself amidst the equivalent of trench warfare. Bullets flew, bombs exploded and shells rained down, in a mind-numbing maelstrom of colour and sound. The sky resonated with the horrors of war as our vision distorted incomprehensibly, like an atom bomb had been detonated in a wax crayon factory. But this is notThe Great War. It's The Retro Ball. A celebration of retro gaming – the first of its kind to be held by videogaming veterans Chris Wilkins, Pete Beverley and Leigh Cooper.

For retro die-hards there was everything from handheld *Space Invaders*, *Cosmic Scramble* and *Astro Wars* to classic arcade machines like *Galaxians*, *Operation Wolf* and *Time Crisis* (which burned out by the end of the first day). There were pinball machines as well as many other tasty favourites: Vectrex, Vic 20, Atari 2600, Dragon 32, Intellivision, NES, MAME cabinets playing hundreds of games (including *Nemesis* and *King Of Fighters*), tabletops, and a room dedicated to the Japanese Pachinko machines.The original 1983 *Star Wars* arcade with its beautiful wireframe visuals was a big hit and a delightful throwback to the days when the cabinet would be swamped by school boys. Sega's *Daytona USA* took a pounding, as did *Way Of The Exploding Fist* on the C64. Console Passion had almost every cart and peripheral imaginable and it was a surprise to learn that Intellivision (the world's first 16-bit console with speech pack, keyboard and advanced joypad that's only been equalled by Nintendo's Revolution) was a UK sales tragedy that remained popular in France and Spain. And yours, nearly new, boxed, and for only 40 quid, guv. Where's the justice in it all?

The Pachinkos (the playing rules of which are still a mystery) were a joy to behold. Bathed in bright colours, ear-splitting audio, blaring video and crashing metal balls, the Japanese gambling phenomenon is a complex beast and thrashes the UK equivalent. They were like sirens for doomed sailors. Their flashing lights, licensed film footage and decidedly fantastic Asian aesthetics captivated the curious who were hopelessly drawn toward them. Along with an impressive guest list – including Gary Whelen, the world *Galaxian* champion and Archer Maclean, the developer of *Drop Zone* and *Jimmy White's World Snooker* – the event was a resounding success. The Ball's atmospherics and visuals were overwhelming; a celebration of the birth of the videogame from the 1970s to the present day, all in a wondrous arcade hall.

"BATHED IN BRIGHT COLOURS, EAR-SPLITTING AUDIO, BLARING VIDEO AND CRASHING METAL BALLS"

This was sheer gaming nirvana that attracted a wide spectrum of people, as well as the opportunity to play and buy the games that had eluded many since their childhoods. Thankfully, a bar served a range of decent lagers and beers, and by midnight, strangers had become firm friends. Much hilarity was supplied by a drunken multiplayer bash of *Mashed* on the PS2 where **games™** miraculously made it to the final.

The Retro Ball was a success, and Jon Hare, founder, owner and designer of Sensible Software, couldn't agree more. "It's much busier than I thought it would be," he admits, "I think for a one-off and a first, it's quite successful. The videogames industry doesn't give a shit about retro, it just makes a little money off the back of it. Companies like Codemasters are starting to wake up to it now, but the mainstream videogames industry, with triple-A titles, is not really gunning at this market at all." Unsurprisingly, organiser Chris Wilkins was in a jubilant mood. "We built it and hoped that people would come, and they did," he says. "They've played and they've had a good time. Everything that I've heard so far has been positive. We went to the CGE this summer and liked what we saw, but we wanted to do something a little different. We wanted to hold a gaming event and not a sales or trading event." Wilkins and his fellow organisers did just that, an ▶

JON HARE ON SENSIBLE SOCCER

"The way I view it, in terms of marketing, the people who will initially buy [*Sensible Soccer*] are the 30-something generation, no doubt about it. They'll recognise the name. But what I am hoping, and what I believe will happen, is that we'll find their kids and their younger brothers will pick up the game and say, 'this is good', and tell their mates. I can see some problems for the younger kids when they'll say, 'this is shit. That guy doesn't look like Thierry Henry'. You know, fuck it. If he doesn't, he doesn't. That's not the kind of game we're making. But apart from those people, those who are into this game, and are not hell-bent on their lives being dictated by television, will love this brilliant game. And […] when we were discussing retro, Codemasters, as a company, is starting to look at this game seriously now. And if it's starting to see the value of getting old licences and bringing them back to life again, *Sensible Soccer*'s future is looking bright."



▲ Okay, so *Donkey Konga* isn't exactly what we'd describe as retro gaming – but it brings people together like no other bongo-based game.

unprecedented gaming experience for the fans by the fans. "As far as I'm concerned, it's a celebration of gaming from the late Seventies to the current systems," he adds. "We wanted to achieve a sense of gaming ambience with the sound, so we created a number of zones: shoot-'em-up, driving, fighting, Pachinkos and so on. We were aiming to get a different sight, sound and feel in the building and it works really well."

THE DREAM

Apart from the nostalgia value, what does the retro game have in spades that attracts a loyal fan base? And after 20 years, why do retro games have longevity, especially when compared to the cutting-edge modern day videogames that boast cinematic audio and visuals? Jon Hare, the genius behind *Cannon Fodder* and *Sensible Soccer* is keen to make his point. "What the games have is an immediacy of gameplay, something quick to get into," he explains, "and your time is spent doing something rather than watching it load. You engage your brain. People forget that a game of chess is very engaging and it doesn't move, and it won't move for up to 15 minutes. You play the game in your head and not through your eyes. A lot of people – especially today's game designers – forget this. I think the thing about old games is that people could create worlds."

Philip Oliver and Simon Smith of Blitz Games, agree. Blitz has been around since the dawn of video gaming and worked on a range of platforms and operating systems, so they know what makes a good game tick. "We're often asked about *Dizzy* and why it captivated people back then, and why they remembered it so much," Oliver says. "One of the things that the old machines did because the graphics were so basic, was make you actually imagine the world a lot more. I think, in some ways, it's a bit like *Harry Potter* and JK Rowling. A lot of people say that the books actually tell a better story than the movies because when you're reading the books, you imagine the scenes as you want them to be. So when you see a film, you're almost disappointed as you're seeing someone else's vision and not your own."

Oliver appears to be enjoying reminiscing over the good old 8-bit days. "And those games had to have gameplay, because if they didn't, you'd notice it damned quick. These days, the graphics are so awesome that some games hit the shelves without having any gameplay at all." "It's all about the gameplay," Smith confirms. "Pick up and play, that's what it's all about. Games that are fun, that you can pick up straight away and have fun with, whether its *Time Crisis* where you shoot with a gun, or *Dizzy* where you simply move left and right and pick things up. In other words, simplicity."

One of the fascinating aspects of The Retro Ball is not just about playing games, but to walk the aisles and inspect what's up for sale. It's a blast to the past, as early computers, consoles and games – most boxed and in mint condition – were available for very modest fees. Console Passion's selection of games and machines was mind-boggling: from the 3DO, Amstrad GX4000, MSX, Amiga CD32, Atari Jaguar, Philips CDi

▲ There was a massive selection of machines to play with, as well as plenty of games for retro fans to lose themselves in once again.

and Colecovision, all complete with a wide variety of cartridges and tapes. For those willing to burn a hole in their pocket, the star selling attraction was a beautiful *Pac-Man* table-top machine – yours for £595. It was a wonderful sight. We were tempted, but we needed our beer money.

THE REALITY

The vast majority of those at the Retro Ball were over the age of 20. We wonder whether the retro game will rise like a phoenix from the ashes and find a new generation of players, or just whither away, a forgotten chapter of gaming history in its infancy? Andy Brown of Console Passion believes so. "I hate to say it, but I think retro gaming is lost forever," he says sadly. "It's weird because it gets incorporated into new games, such as *Super Monkey Ball*, that have really simplistic hidden and bonus games. So some new games have an element of retro in them – the party game, especially. But as a general rule, retro is a lost cause because the people who develop the games think that the big money is in the flashy, graphic, Hollywood cinematic-type games," he adds.

The Retro Ball's organisers are more optimistic, in that they have children that want to play *Metal Slug* and *Sonic The Hedgehog*, but reality

"THE INDUSTRY MAKES LITTLE MONEY FROM RETRO, BUT NOW COMPANIES ARE STARTING TO WAKE UP"

PHILIP OLIVER ON BLITZ

"[Early games] sold on gameplay and couldn't sell on graphics or audio, but when graphics started to improve, people began to stop putting the gameplay in. So what we realised, when we were halfway through the PSone era, is that it's not about creating a challenge, and that's what a lot of the early games were doing. It's actually about creating entertainment, and that's when we changed the way we did our games. We discovered, when we were writing *Action Man*, that in the early days you absolutely had to challenge the player and that they had to die occasionally. Whereas these days, you don't need to do that – you're creating entertainment. *Bratz* is an absolutely fantastic example. There is no concept of a game in *Bratz* – it's just a playground in which to have fun. So what's changed from the old days to now is that gameplay used to be about challenges, now it's about entertainment, and there is a big difference."



Those with cash to spare had the opportunity to buy a few special pieces from the event.



"A BEAUTIFUL PAC-MAN TABLETOP MACHINE COULD BE YOURS FOR A LITTLE UNDER £600"

has set in for Pete Beverley who sees the X360 and PS3 as the final death knell for the retro game. It may have a cult following, but he doubts it will attract younger players. "I don't think we'll ever see the ease of the pick-up-and-play games again," he mourns over a lager. "The manuals are getting thicker; the games, more complex; and every button on the keyboard and joystick are used… Sadly, I think the days of retro games making a comeback are definitely over. And it's a pity. You just don't want that steep learning curve that modern games have. Let's say you've had a long day at work, you go home, want to relax in front of the TV. You just want to play a game. You can't do that with the games of today."

Thankfully, Blitz and Jon Hare are more positive and suggest that the new generation of consoles can raise retro to a new level as well as attract a fresh brood of gamers. Blitz believes the 360 Live Arcade will be the future of retro. Hare is positively spinning about the rebirth of *Sensible Soccer* on PS2, Xbox and PC for 2006.

Hare also asserts that retro and modern gaming can complement each other. "We're deliberately making gameplay more immediate, in other words, trying to replicate *Sensible Soccer* and modernise certain areas in keeping with modern games," he says, "but we're keeping the overall feel of it as *Sensible Soccer*. If you look at games like *FIFA*, even though it's a brilliant game, it's still very hard to get into, and quite slow to play. If you pick up our new *Sensible Soccer*, you'll find yourself engaged. It's a different experience. In other words, it doesn't replace modern gaming, but it can certainly sell alongside it as something else you can do. I think *Sensible Soccer* will give to younger people who never had the chance to play it, something, ironically, very new and fresh because they can pick it up, play the game for three minutes, put it down and make a cup of tea. We have a game for up to four players, whereas before it was one-on-one. So we're taking the features from modern games that work and not all the excess animation stuff that isn't necessary, but at the same time, adding enough animation so it looks contemporary."

After two days of retro heaven, most were dazzled by the lights, deafened by the noise, and had bruised and bloodied fingers through excessive joystick play and manic button pushing. But that's a good thing. A thriving community was born where the hardcore and curious gamer could chew the fat and meet like-minded souls, as well as raise money for a good cause. At the end of the weekend, we raised our glasses in the hope that a Retro Ball 2 would become a reality. ■



▲ Listening to the tricks of the retro trade from the horse's – or rather, Philip Oliver's – mouth made for an interesting time.



GAMES THAT TIME FORGOT

WE ATTEMPT TO REWRITE THE HISTORY BOOKS BY SALUTING THOSE CLASSIC GAMES THAT HAVE FALLEN BY THE WAYSIDE

WHO FRAMED ROGER RABBIT?

A NOMINEE FOR THE TOUGHEST TIE-IN EVER…

Ah, the world of Game Boy movie and television tie-ins. At the height of the Nintendo wonder's success, it seemed that every big property was transported to the machine. Most of them were simply turned into left-to-right platformers while the makers sat back and watched the cash roll in. There were a few notable exceptions though – *DuckTales* was one and *Who Framed Roger Rabbit?* was another.

You'd imagine that the cartoon world of *Roger Rabbit* would be the perfect vehicle for a no-brainer Mario clone, but instead Capcom produced a complex and, frankly, bloody difficult adventure that was more about expansive exploration than bouncing brainlessly onto characters' heads. For once, there is no convoluted plot either; it mirrors the film perfectly and sees the evil Judge Doom attempting to take over Toon Town while eradicating all of the toons, including our hero Roger and the sultry (yes, that's right – sultry) Jessica Rabbit.

In order to beat the odds, Roger needed to traverse the city streets and collect a number of items that could then be used in the fight against Judge Doom. Of course, the action doesn't stop there; just like the film, it's Doom's army of weasels that do the grunt work and attempt to wipe out the 'wabbit'. This is where the game introduces a number of weapons that are worthy of the Looney Tunes cartoons that originally inspired it, if only because they look so painful in their use. (An interesting point about the weasels is that they were the victims of Nintendo's strict guidelines – while characters such as Greasy and Psycho survived unhindered, it was thought that having a weasel called Smart Ass might warp young players' minds and so the devious fellow became Smarty instead.)

What set *Who Framed Roger Rabbit?* apart, though, was just how hard it was; it remains one of the Game Boy's toughest games and few of us ever reached the end, even with the essential password system. In fact, as we began to reminisce about the trickiness of the game and rediscovered the passwords for later levels on the net, we found that even almost 15 years later, *Who Framed Roger Rabbit?* remains one of the toughest games on the handheld block… and no it wasn't just that we were rubbish at games in the old days.

Revisiting the game, we remain impressed by its graphical content; the style and locations from the movie really come alive, despite the mono restrictions of the hardware – compare this black and white classic with the endless variations of *SpongeBob SquarePants* and other cartoon favourites that roll off the conveyor belt every month, and *Who Framed Roger Rabbit?* stands out as one of the finest examples of the genre. Now where's that final level password…?



▼ Oh, it may look all sweet and innocent, but Capcom created a real challenge.

Release: 1991
Format: Gameboy
Publisher: Capcom
Developer: In-House



FRANKIE GOES TO HOLLYWOOD [Various] Ocean, 1985 – Original UK Advert



Why Don't They Remake...

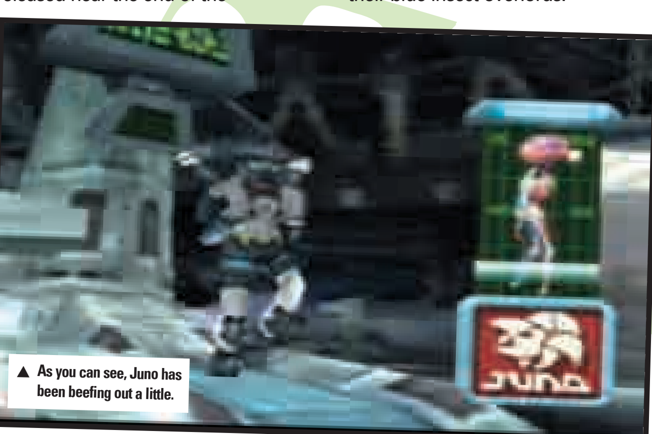
JET FORCE GEMINI

RELEASED NEAR THE END OF THE LAST GEN, SURELY IT'S TIME TO DO THIS GAME JUSTICE?

Release: **1999**
Format: **Nintendo 64**
Publisher: **Nintendo**
Developer: **Rare**

Many of yesteryear's greatest games would suffer greatly if anyone ever tried to remake them. The core dynamics of well-loved 2D classics rarely survive the enormous leap into the third dimension, and it's often exceptionally difficult to recreate a two-dimensional visual style on modern consoles. Indeed, there are many who would argue that most classic games are best left in the past. However, *Jet Force Gemini* was released near the end of the Nintendo 64's lifespan in 1999, when the technology began to show its age a little. Upon playing *JFG* today, you can't help but wish it were on current-gen hardware… so why won't Rare remake it?

Jet Force Gemini was one of Rare's last excellent games. It was a futuristic, third-person space blaster with a healthy dollop of classic British humour, and a dog with rockets strapped to his underside (something which, in our opinion, every game should have). Throughout the game, the player took control of all three members of *JFG* – twins Juno and Vela and their awesome dog Lupus – in order to liberate furry Ewok-like creatures called the Tribals from slavery under their blue insect overlords.


▲ As you can see, Juno has been beefing out a little.


▼ Lupus could even float, despite being a tank.

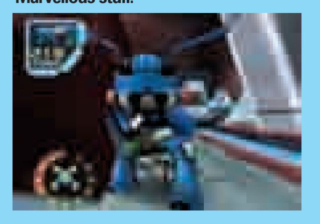
What made the game so exceptional was that it could have been broken down into four separate ones – and each would still have been regarded as excellent. It had the varied platforming of *Banjo-Kazooie*, insane third-person action coupled with just enough of the more complex sniping of *GoldenEye*, and a space theme a bit like *Perfect Dark's* – everything good about Rare's previous N64 titles found its way into *Jet Force Gemini*, and yet it still had its own distinct identity.

For a game of its time, it was extraordinarily open-ended. The bright, lovely-looking levels were large and gave the player little or no direction, which took some getting used to back in the days when 'linearity' didn't necessarily equate to 'laziness'. There were loads of secret places, hidden Tribals, and incentives to play through again and again. Like many of Rare's games back then, it was quite difficult to get to 100 per cent completion, although the story could be played through relatively easily. However, the rewards, such as building a robotic sidekick out of hidden parts scattered throughout levels, made it all feel worth it.

These days the single-analogue control feels awkward, but the core gameplay hasn't aged in the slightest. There's nothing quite like its eclectic mix of features and comforting yet challenging combo of old and modern gameplay. With the same style and updated graphics, plus a proper control system, *JFG* could be an enormous current-gen hit. So come on, Rareware – all you have to do is update it a little.

GETTING A-HEAD

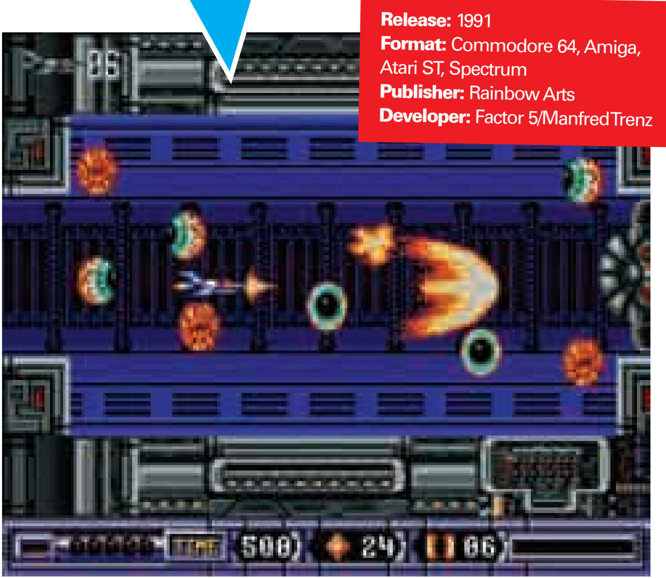
***Jet Force Gemini* had truckloads of collectables, including the delightfully Tribal practise of collecting the heads of dead blue ant aliens. Unlike the many hidden items and furry Tribal friends (which could also be shot up a bit if you were feeling really sadistic), heads were awarded for skilful shooting so, where at the beginning of the game you'd be lucky to pick up one or two in a level, you'd be carting around sackfuls of them by the end. Marvellous stuff.**



Great RETRO Gaming Moments

HEY, FLYBOY… WHERE DO YOU THINK YOU'RE GOING?

TURRICAN II



Release: 1991
Format: Commodore 64, Amiga, Atari ST, Spectrum
Publisher: Rainbow Arts
Developer: Factor 5/Manfred Trenz

Few can deny that Manfred Trenz's *Turrican* series is a classic creation – the frantic side-scrolling blasting action, packed with vibrant colour and detail, left its mark on many of us over the years and *Turrican II* certainly stands out as the high-point of the franchise. However, those people coming to the much-loved sequel expecting more of the same were in for a shock at the end of the second level, as the game's eponymous hero climbed aboard a spacecraft for more traditional shoot-'em-up fare…

Standing apart from the rest of the game's action, the three side-scrolling sections making up *Turrican II*'s third stage tested a player's skills on every level. The first part acted as a simple shooter, packed with enemies for you to blast (enemies, that looked very familiar to those with experience of *Katakis*, another of Trenz's creations). The second needed more skill with the joystick, as the continually moving screen – shifting in multiple directions rather than just from right to left – required you to pilot your ship through tight passages. Finally, the third was a sprint through more winding tunnels at breakneck speed, with fast reflexes needed to make it to the boss battle.

Accompanied by some incredibly memorable music – including a beat-ridden tune opened by an immortal 'P-p-p-powerslide!' voice sample – we find ourselves wanting to play these levels over and over… despite the fact that there's the rest of the game to enjoy as well.

GREAT GAME BOSSES



THE R-TYPE BATTLESHIP

THAT'S NO MOON… IT'S A BLOODY GREAT BATTLESHIP. SHOOT IT, QUICK!

Release: 1987
Format: Arcade
Origin: Japan
Developer: Irem

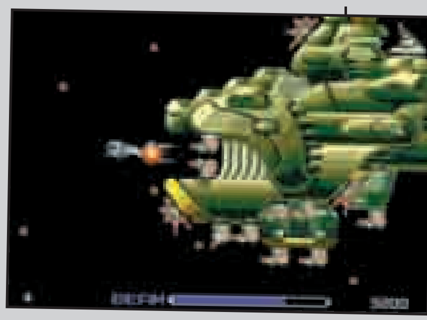
When *R-Type* hit the arcades, it set a new standard that many strived for and few bettered. The game was menacing and completely addictive, although that was as much for the thrilling combat as it was for the horde of overwhelming bosses you had to go up against.

After fighting through the first two levels, you would find yourself up against something really nasty – a huge battleship, strewn with all manner of defences to stop you in your path.

It was designed to give you a feeling of being overwhelmed by its sheer size, and being one of the biggest bosses seen in its time (spanning many screens), you must patiently and precisely manoeuvre your comparatively miniscule craft while collecting the right power-ups to ensure that you have the fire power to be able to deal with its many defences.

Its purposeful movements can confuse at first and lead you to your peril. For what seems like an hour, you could battle it out, learning the way in which it moved and the best place to stay safe.

The battleship is the very pinnacle of what defines a good boss – it is not really surprising that the idea has been replicated in many other shmups since – as it is foreboding and gives you the feeling of insignificance, and yet has a weakness that would be its eventual downfall. That is, when you can go no further, there's a protected core that will take the whole battleship out, sending you to victory and that hunk of metal to the scrap yard. And yes, what a truly glorious victory it is – just remember that the war is far from over.



▲ The mother of all battleships – don't be put off by its size, just aim for the core and your path to victory.





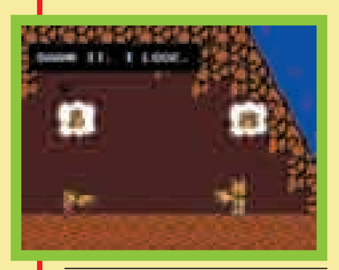


Alex Kidd in Miracle World

Before Sega gave us Sonic, we were treated to Alex Kidd. We look back at his first and best title

CONFRONT THE BOSS

Arguably the highlight of *Alex Kidd* were the bosses, well, some of them. Forgetting that stupid bull/pig thing that just ran at you, and the bear with a sword, you had Janken The Great's henchman waiting at the end of each key area. That's right, they wanted to play Janken with you (that's Rock, Paper, Scissors to you guys) before you could pass, and unless you had the Telepathy Ball or knew the routine, it was guesswork. Failure to win two out of three turned you to stone. As annoying as it was at times, they're still some of the most memorable boss confrontations we've ever had.



▲ He's got scissors for a head – how can you not know what he's going to play?

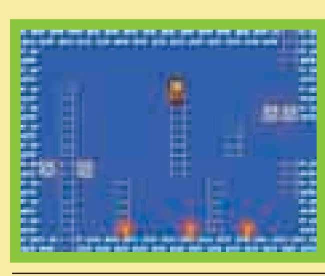
Release: 1986
Format: Master System
Publisher: Sega
Developer: In-House

The words 'now there are no limits' are what the US were force-fed when the Master System was released in 1985. To this day, we are unsure of what was being implied by this slogan, as the Master System was limited in many ways, but it did provide a much-needed rival for the NES. Here in the UK we had to wait a year before we could sample Sega's Master System delights, but come 1986 – when some of us were strapping bin lids to our backs in an effort to look a little more like a Teenage Mutant Hero Turtle – it was our turn.

Alex Kidd In Miracle World arrived as a cute character in a cute world, who was out to rescue his people from a tyrant by way of platforming fun – it was a formula that was proven to be a success. This wasn't the high point for the title though, thanks to the continued success of the NES, *Mr Kidd* wasn't recognised as the gaming icon that he was and instead the masses concentrated their attentions on a certain plumber.



▲ So much blue sky… where did it all go, eh?



▲ Luckily, there are no snakes to go with the ladders.

Nope, it wasn't until 1991, when Sega launched the Master System II, that things really took off for *Alex Kidd*. Due to the release of the Mega Drive, the Master System II was aimed at a younger audience: a smooth, bulbous design was complimented by a red sliding hood, and soon the angular Master System was just a memory. However, hidden beneath that red hood was a further treat… *Alex Kidd In Miracle World* was built-in.

Now we all know what a hassle it is having to insert a game into a machine. You've got to get a worthy title, open the box, remove the cartridge, put it in the machine – it's hard work. Well, none of this was necessary with *Miracle World*, you could just kick back and enjoy. And enjoy, people did. Thanks to the unavoidable purchase of the game and the fact that it started when you powered up the machine, *Alex Kidd* finally got the acclaim it deserved – and is still a worthy play today.

Devoid of cheating Quick Saves and multiple save points, *Miracle World* was far tougher than first thought. If you wanted to collect all the cash, release all the evil ghosts and rack down every object, there was a fair amount of expertise required. Precision jumping with a little ape-boy who has a tendency to 'float' at the peak of every jump is not an easy task and there were some points in the game that were severely punishing if you hadn't mastered jumping sufficiently. The jungle area for example: there were spikes everywhere, tiny floating blocks provided the somewhat treacherous path through the stage and leaf-throwing monkeys just



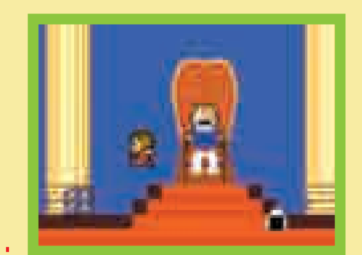
One of the toughest parts of any videogame we've ever played… and we've finished *Devil May Cry 3*.

"WITH MIRACLE WORLD, YOU COULD JUST KICK BACK AND ENJOY"

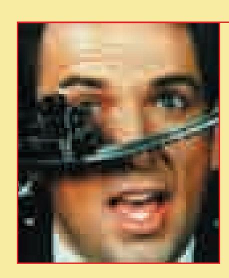
made your life harder – it was certainly no picnic.

That said, a decent player would have passed through the first castle and would have arrived at the final second one after about 45 minutes, but here's where it often went wrong. One room near the end of the second castle featured a drop-away floor that plunged you into a spike-filled water section. It was nearly impossible to continue as *Alex Kidd*'s swimming controls left much to be desired. The trick? To use the Cane of Flight (available only twice in the entire game) to hover over the collapsible floor and up to the safely of a tucked away ladder. Don't have the Cane of Flight? Don't have the insane skills necessary to conquer the water spikes? Then it's game over and you'll know for next time. Even using 800 cash and holding up while mashing B on the Game Over screen to get a crafty continue couldn't help you. It was pretty harsh.

Likewise, hidden in the first castle was a letter. You didn't need this to continue, but not bothering would leave you without the Stone Tablet – an object that told you the symbol combination needed to complete the last area. Without it you were doomed to perish at the hands of the many ghosts. What a game, eh?

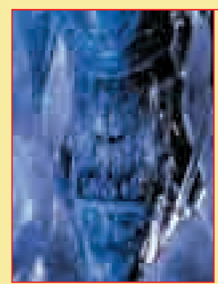


OTHER HIGHLIGHTS OF 1986



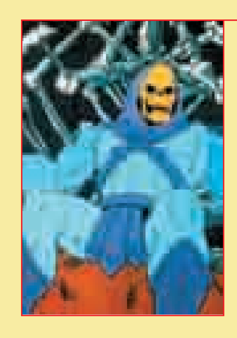
ON THE RADIO

Peter Gabriel's irritatingly catchy *Sledgehammer* haunted the charts in June. We doubt even the man himself could've been aware that years later he'd accidentally release the same song; only he'd change the words and call it *Steam*. This non-fact aside, *Sledgehammer*'s popularity was largely due to the video showing Pete's face turn into lots of fruit.



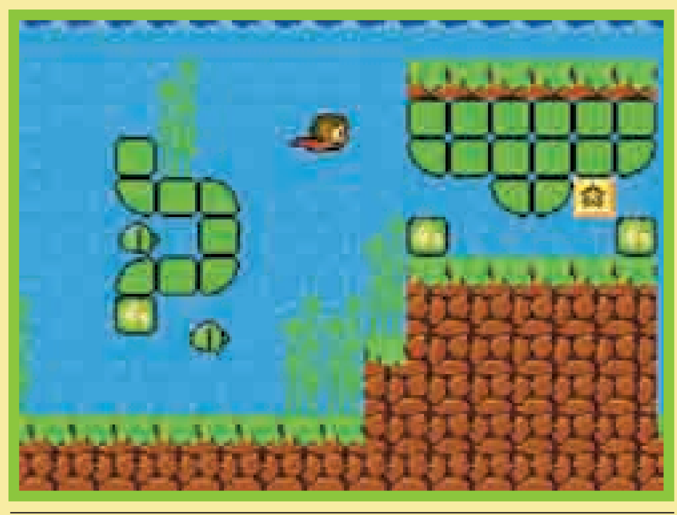
AT THE MOVIES

"Get away from her you bitch." For whatever reason, this line is what most took away from the frankly awesome *Aliens*. You paid your money and in return you received roughly 130 minute of James Cameron throwing HR Giger at you. Unfortunately, watching *Aliens* today only serves to remind you that *AVP* was easily the worst idea ever and a waste of perfectly good CGI.



ON THE TELEVISION

He-Man And The Masters Of The Universe was in full swing and kids everywhere were beating each other with swords of power (brooms) and discussing exactly how rubbish Mech-A-Neck was. Somehow children were unable to realise the level of poorness achieved by the toys which the series was based upon, even the squat model of Mossman – who 'really smells' – made Mattel a fair few pennies.



Lose the boat and you ended up swimming through the stage and fighting bubble-blowing frog things. That's life.

100 GREATEST RETRO GAMES

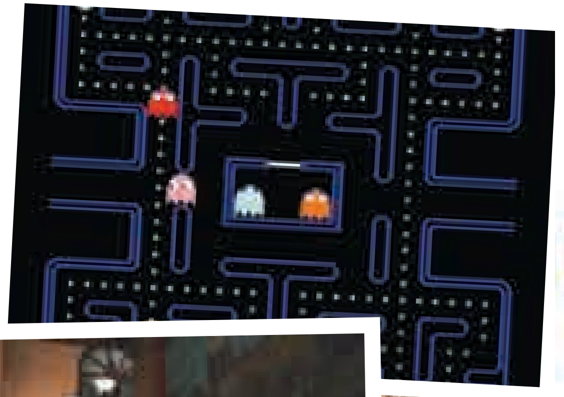
PART 1 100-51

The votes have been counted and the results are in...

Everyone has an opinion on this almost indefinable question: what is the greatest retro videogame of all time? The possibilities, as they say, are endless, and so in the spirit of democracy, we threw it open to you, dear friends, to come up with the answer. No rules, no agendas, no pre-determined results, we just gave you the chance to write in or go online and reveal the games you love. Then our voting goblins emptied the ballot box and came up with this definitive list.

Naturally, there are going to be a few surprises, but we don't want to spoil the surprise. And we should point out that attempts to cheat were intercepted – yes, Matthew Smith (who voted for all his own games), that means you.

So without further ado, we give you the countdown from 100 to 51. Remember, don't shoot the messenger – it's YOUR list. Enjoy.











Oh those damn monsters, why won't they leave us to collect our eggs in peace? Good job I'm wearing my lucky hat, isn't it?

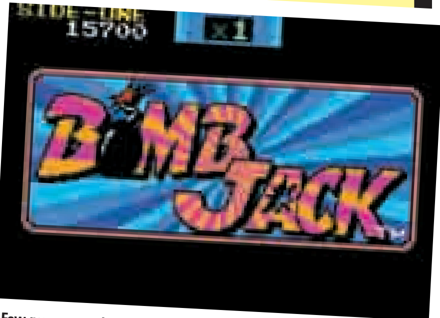
Chuckie Egg 100

In the early Eighties, it was *Chuckie Egg* that proved to be the big home computer phenomenon. Originally released for the BBC, Dragon and Spectrum formats, the game soon spawned versions for everything from the Commodore 64 to the MSX.

The gameplay is simple: players take on the role of Harry, who needs to collect all of the eggs spread around each level. Your main foes are a bunch of patrolling hens, and the screens are littered with stacks of seeds which can be devoured for more points. One of the earliest platform romps, *Chuckie Egg* remains one of the most loved moments in home computing.

Bombjack 99

You have two objectives: avoid the floating monsters and collect the bombs that fill the screen. One bomb at a time has a lit fuse and you get a bonus for collecting them all, which is tough thanks to the slow but resourceful foes. Luckily, in a similar fashion to *Pac-Man's* Power Pills, Bombjack can grab a special ball to freeze the action, allowing you to defeat monsters by touching them. The most memorable thing about this great game is the colourful background pictures – who can forget that classic rendition of the Sphinx?



Few games can claim to be as explosive as this one – and very few are as eye-bleedingly colourful too.



Ladies and gentlemen, the most entertaining rabbit in videogame history is here to dance and sing for your delectation!

Vib Ribbon 98

Often the simplest ideas are the best, and *Vib Ribbon* is a case in point. Control the dancing rabbit as he moves along wiggling lines… that's it. Still, the magic of *Vib Ribbon* is that you can insert your own CDs into the PlayStation and Vibri will dance with varying levels of difficulty. Make a mistake and Vibri devolves into a tiny worm, fail again and it's game over. Trust us, once you've encountered *Vib Ribbon*, you'll want to go through your entire record collection to see how Vibri performs to your favourite tunes

Last Ninja 2 97

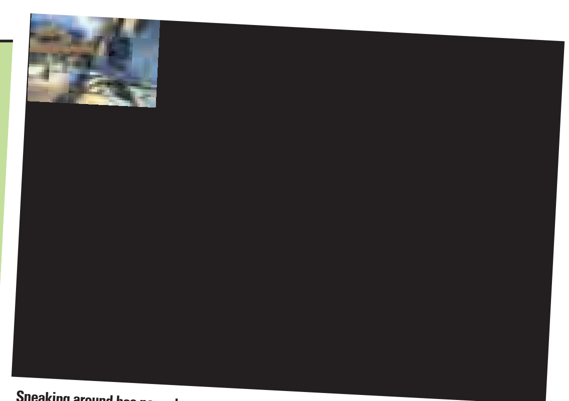
In terms of subtitles, *Last Ninja 2: Back With A Vengeance* really laid on the line that this was more than a cheap sequel. Whereas the original took place in Ninth Century Japan, the sequel transported master ninja Armakuni to 20th Century New York (something about a blinding light that sped him through time or something…). The isometric viewpoint gives *Last Ninja 2* a stylised look, and as well as adding new weapons to the mix, it added new adventure-style elements and devilish puzzles. C64 gaming at its best.



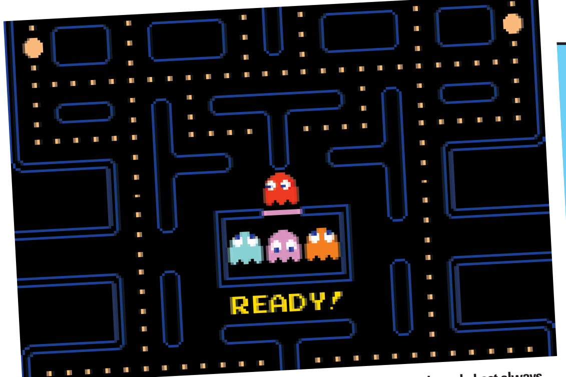
The world's greatest ninja can also multi-task; here he manages to carry a stick while holding a key. What a guy.

Perfect Dark 96

One of the N64s crowning moments – anyone who still believed Nintendo was only about 'kiddy games' was silenced with this stylish and violent adult adventure. Another triumph for the seemingly unstoppable Rare, *Perfect Dark* is often seen as the unofficial sequel to *GoldenEye 007* as, although it doesn't feature the smarmy super-spy, it does feature a similar playing style and, in fact, uses an improved version of the *007* engine. Actually, *Perfect Dark* squeezed so much into the N64 that an expansion pack was needed to run the game – making the price tag too hefty for many gamers, which may explain why *Perfect Dark*, while still fêted by gamers, never achieved the iconic status of Rare's other works.



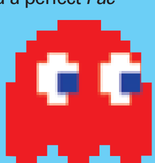
Sneaking around has never been so much fun, especially when it leads to shooting someone in the head and watching them die.



Oh Pac-Man, how we love thee. What we don't love is the fact that the red ghost always knows exactly where we are.

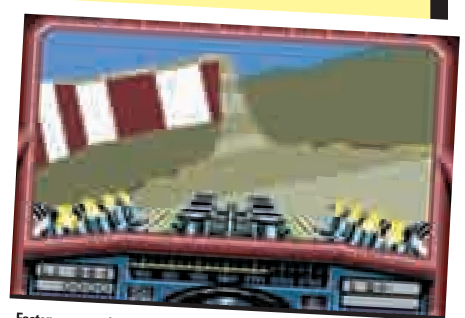
95 Pac-Man

A bonefide arcade classic and one of the iconic titles that truly kickstarted the videogames revolution. If you've been unfortunate enough to have been living in a cave for the last 25 years and don't know the premise of *Pac-Man*, it revolves around exploring a maze while ghosts try to stop you eating all of the dots on the screen. Eat a powerpill and the hunter becomes the hunted with our hero able to chomp the evil ghosts. For the first time ever, in 1999 Billy Mitchell achieved a perfect *Pac-Man* score of 3,333,360 achieved by eating all the blue ghosts, every bonus and all the dots, over a massive 256 levels. Impressive.



94 Stunt Car Racer

This Amiga favourite added new depth to the racing genre by presenting racers with an environment where you experienced a great height and depth rather than the usual 'racing forwards toward the finishing line'. Yes, today we might be used to such graphical brilliance but in the late Eighties, this undulation was revolutionary, there was a real sense of danger as you raced up and down tracks that resembled twisted rollercoasters.


Fasten your seatbelt, slam your foot down on the accelerator and get set to hit the ramps. Guaranteed to make you car sick.

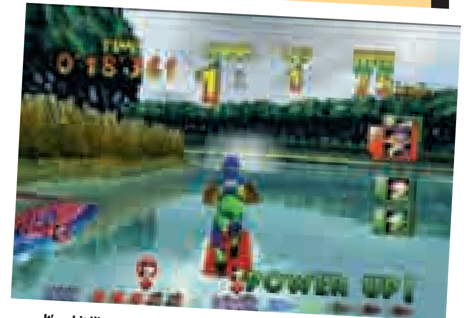

Whenever you find yourself exploring an ageing mansion, you just know that something really bad is about to happen to you.

93 Resident Evil

The market might be saturated with Survival Horror games these days, but when *Resident Evil* arrived, it was a new and terrifying gaming experience. It uses spine tingling psychological horror which plays with your mind and makes sure that every creaking door that you open leaves you dreading what might be on the other side. Anyone who has not experienced the thrill of jumping out of your skin as zombie dogs leap through the window really hasn't lived. Even with its age, we still have to play the original *Resi* with the lights on…

92 Wave Race 64

An early example of what the N64 was capable of, *Wave Race 64* has rarely been matched for beautiful water effects coupled with rewarding gameplay. The thing that made the game so tricky was the changing tides, yes, just like in the real sport the wave patterns are different every time and so unlike road-based racers, even if you learn the course, it doesn't mean you'll automatically be able to take the flag. Excellent graphics, excellent sound effects and a multiplayer to die for, this is Nintendo at its very best.



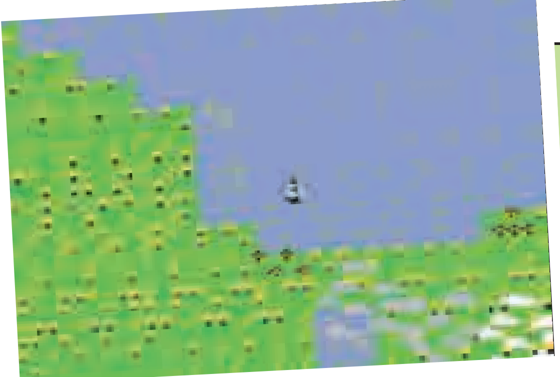
It's a bit like your classic racing game, but without roads. Or cars. Actually, it's nothing like a normal racing game.

91 Fire Pro Wrestling D

Before *Smackdown* took over the genre, it was the *Fire Pro* series that ruled the wrestling roost and, indeed, it seems this Dreamcast incarnation is still the best of the best. While parts of the game (the highly impressive wrestler entrances, for example) are in 3D, the main game uses 2D effectively and stylishly. Brilliantly animated, the game also offers grapplers a number of modes ranging from an insane Battle Royal to a one-on-one face off. The game also scores by offering more insane Japanese styles of matches such as the Exploding Cage and Barbed Wire options. In terms of gameplay and pure wrestling fun, *Fire Pro Wrestling D* on the Dreamcast has yet to be beaten.



Keep saying your prayers and eating your vitamins and one day you might get to step into the squared circle against this behemoth.



Ahoy there, me hearties. Come join us as we sail the seven seas. Yo ho ho, a pirate's life for me. Arrr…

90 Pirates!

While *Pirates!* was originally spawned on the Commodore 64, it is the Amiga version that most people remember most fondly. The game straddled pretty much every genre, but was, at heart, a role-playing adventure where you had to get yourself a fearsome reputation as the scurviest sea dog on the high seas. It's not all about talking and scheming though, there's plenty of action to be had including bloody sword fights (whether it be a rapier or your common longsword, you could cause serious injury) or fights against other boats. All the time you must also try and accrue as much swag as possible. The perfect balance of strategy and action, *Pirates!* was another Sid Meier triumph.

89 Vandal Hearts

Although it does have all of the hallmarks of a Square classic videogame, *Vandal Hearts,* in actual fact, hails from Konami and is a turn-based masterpiece which keeps you coming back for more, even in spite of the initially complex scenarios.

Vandal Hearts rewards gamers who don't just jump straight into the action – planning your attack before you begin moving your squad achieves far better results and means that you might actually live to see the next map.

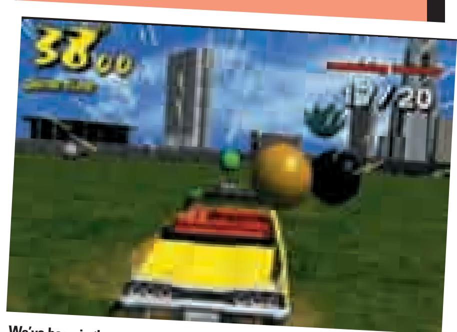
Special mention should go to the epic soundtrack and genuinely excellent sound effects in *Vandal Hearts* which helped to create one of the original PlayStation's deepest gaming pleasures.



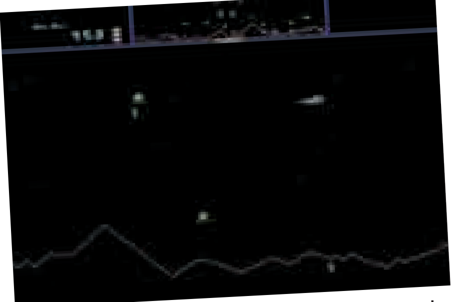
The RPG world in excelsis. There's fire, there's quirky and bizarre characters, there's a compass we can't follow and there's POWERFUL MAGIC.

88 Crazy Taxi

Sega's expertise for creating classic arcade games gave us *Crazy Taxi,* a simple idea that really caught the imagination of arcade-goers. And the idea really is simple: traverse the town, picking up fares and driving them to their destinations before the time runs out. That's it. But, by god was it addictive – a great example of the 'just one more go' syndrome. *Crazy Taxi* was one of the Dreamcast's greatest achievements, and of course there would be later versions.



We've been in the car with some reckless and blatantly crazy taxi drivers in our time, but none as mental as this guy.



If ever a single screenshot could bring back a multitude of happy memories of life down at the arcade, then this is the one.

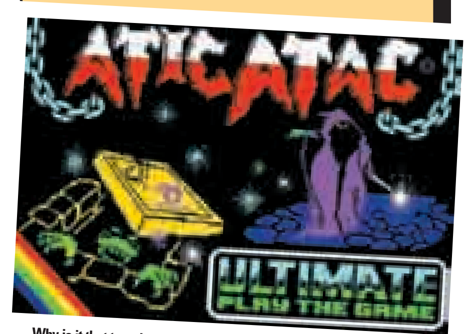
87 Defender

This 25 year-old space adventure revolutionised the shoot-'em-up. It featured a horizontal scrolling environment full of aliens to defeat and humans to save. Created by Eugene Jarvis, rumour has it that the industry expected it to fail, but history has proved them wrong and *Defender* is up there with *Space Invaders* and *Pac-Man* . Just don't bother with the updated next-generation incarnations which do their best to taint the legacy…

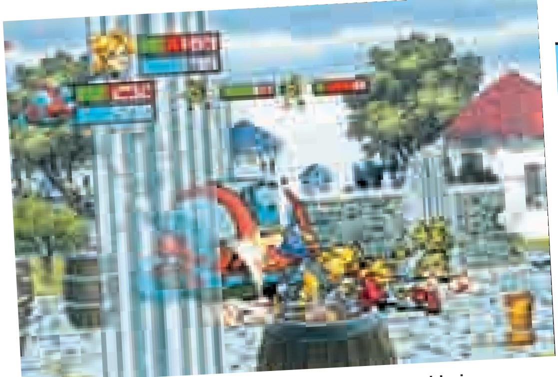


86 Atic Atac

Another example of Ultimate ruling the adventure genre, *Atic Atac* was one of the Spectrum's most colourful adventures. Finding yourself locked in a castle, you must find the golden key and escape. Sound easy? It isn't. The castle is massive and there are all kinds of ghouls and trapdoors to hamper your progress. You also need a supply of food at all times, so as well as finding your way around, you need to use food sparingly. Far from easy, but close to perfect.



Why is it that trap doors always have a nasty creature stirring below? And how come gamers still can't resist opening them?



There weren't that many games that made the Saturn worth buying, but *Guardian Heroes* is one of them.

Guardian Heroes 85

Another in the oh-too-rare series of Games For Saturn Owners To Be Smug About, *Guardian Heroes* is a deep and entertaining RPG from the legendary Treasure Studio. The story is classic role-playing fare, involving an enchanted sword that must be protected at all costs from a powerful sorceror intent on taking over the world.

While at its heart *Guardian Heroes* is an RPG, it also delves heavily into the fighting genre, at times coming across as a more mystical *Final Fight*. The enemies throughout are intelligent and challenging, and the number of different endings and unlockable secrets make *Guardian Heroes* one of the machine's finest titles.

Skool Daze 84

Microsphere's *Skool Daze* hit the Spectrum in 1985, and the tale of troublesome schoolboy Eric soon caught the imagination of gamers everywhere. You are required to steal your report card from the school safe, but first you must find out the four numbers that make up the safe's combination by knocking out the teachers who hold the secrets. Tricky, and made even more so by your fellow students who range from the class swot who will report anything you do wrong, to the school bully who aims to get you blamed for everything.

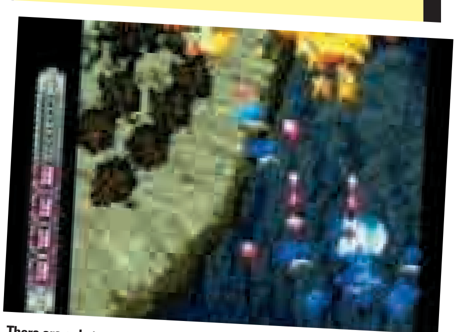
Special mention should also go out to the equally revered (although curiously missing from this list) *Skool Daze* sequel, *Back To Skool*.



We never thought that we would want to go back to school, but *Skool Daze* somehow managed to sway us.

DoDonPachi 83

One of the most insane and brain-melting arcade shooters ever, *DoDonPachi* is one of Atlus' greatest triumphs. Unleashed in 1997, the game is a sequel to 1995's *DonPachi* and takes the intense shooting action of the original to another level. Choosing from three different ships, each with its own shooting style, gamers of any ability can dive straight in. Most noteworthy is the scoring: a guage increases every time an enemy is killed, so blowing things up in quick succession is the way to big points.



There are only two rules with this game: keep your finger on the trigger and don't blink. Oh and try not to die. Hang on, that's three rules.



Gentlemen, start your engines. Come on, start your engines and stop staring at that lady's skimpy outfit.

Ridge Racer 82

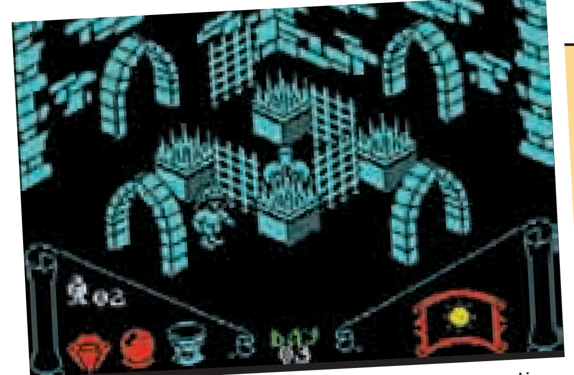
The racing game that launched a thousand PlayStations, *Ridge Racer* remains an arcade-style delight. Yes, as much as we like *Gran Turismo*'s sim style, there's nothing as exciting as speeding round the imaginary courses in Namco's stylish racer. Using fantasy cars and environments, *Ridge Racer* is challenging and crazy. It oozes style, and the fact that the recent Xbox 360 boasts a new edition in the series proves there's plenty of life in the franchise yet, even though we'll never be as surprised as we were by the original.

Pokémon Red/Blue 81

It's strange to think that there was a time when kids weren't obsessed with Pikachu and pals as the phenomenon that is Pokémon became as tied to Nintendo as Mario. The games unite familiar RPG elements with a simple fighting system, meaning that gamers of all ages can easily follow the action. With the *Red* and *Blue* versions offering different Pokémon to capture, Nintendo doubled its profits and we all know what happened after that.



Remember the days before *Pokémon*? We think we do, but it might just be our fertile imaginations.



Many thought that the Spectrum was not capable of producing such stunning graphics. *Knightlore* made them eat their words with a massive isometric spoon.

Knightlore

80

A game that can truly be defined as revolutionary, *Knightlore* really showed what the Spectrum was capable of in terms of graphics, using an isometric viewpoint that simply took gamers' breath away.

As well as the stunning graphics, *Knightlore* had enough gameplay to keep you glued to the keyboard as your half-human half-wolf character searched for a wizard who could break the spell and stop you becoming a fully fledged werewolf. It's not worth thinking about how much of our lives we lost to this Ultimate classic or, indeed, any of its other adventure titles…

Uridium

79

When it comes to shoot-'em-ups that have really impressed us down the years, for the Commodore 64, it has to be *Uridium* that holds the title. The gameplay is similar to arcade classics such as *Zaxxon,* and the ship's ability to spin 180 degrees means that *Uridium* offers much more in the way of movement than many of the shooters of the day, and definitely pushed the hardware to its limit. The game was programmed by Andrew Braybrook, the man behind *Paradroid,* and plays beautifully even today.

Fly through space, shoot anything that moves, repeat to fade, even the most hardcore of gamers found *Uridium* one of the greatest challenges of the era. Brilliant and exciting…



In space no one can hear you scream. Or blast your way past anything stupid enough to get in your way. Fingers on the trigger…

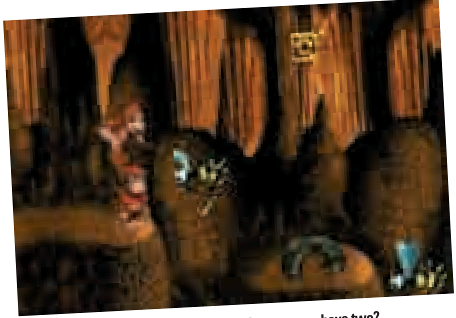
Streets Of Rage

78

S*treets Of Rage* is the most fun you can have cleaning up the streets as three vigilantes wage war on an evil syndicate intent on taking over the city. The three begin with only their knuckles as weapons, but more effective kit is picked up as you traverse the streets. Also, if you play in two-player, instead of being the all-American hero, you can destroy your partner, kill Mr X and become the big man. Who wants to be good anyway?



You can't always beat every situation by raising your fists, remember that. Ow, stop punching me.



Who wants one monkey when you can have two? Nintendo's *Donkey Kong* brought the whole family.

Donkey Kong Country

77

Fans sat open-mouthed as some of the best visuals ever seen on a home console brought *Donkey Kong* back to centre stage for the first time in years. Like *Super Mario* before it, *DK Country* was a challenging, addictive platformer that spawned sequels still deemed brilliant enough to be resurrected on the GBA. While we love *Donkey Kong Country*, it only reminds us that you people have left the original *Donkey Kong* off this list.

Shinobi

76

One of Sega's biggest pre-Hedgehog franchises, *Shinobi* made its arcade debut in 1987. While on the surface, it follows many classic platform dynamics, it offers innovative graphics with different layers on each level offering the chance to not only travel left to right, but 'into the screen' too. The enemies in *Shinobi* are also more intelligent than in most games of the time; learning your moves and reacting realistically rather than the 'on-rails' system that we had grown used to.



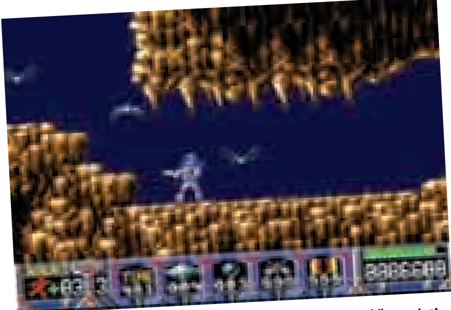
One of the arcade's greatest adventures, *Shinobi* also featured some of the most colourful enemies that we've ever seen…



He may not have much in the way of animation or detail, but Willy does have a rather spiffy hat.

74 Link's Awakening

The first *Zelda* adventure for handhelds, there was a worry that Miyamoto couldn't squeeze his creation onto the Game Boy, but he did it and *Link's Awakening* is every bit as playable as its home console incarnations. Once again we find Zelda in danger having been put to sleep, and Link must traverse the seas to set things right. Proving its excellence, the game also received a re-release on Nintendo's new Game Boy Color.



Even when aided by such a powerful set of armour, the world's greatest heroes are all scared of bats. They're like rats. With wings.

75 Jet Set Willy

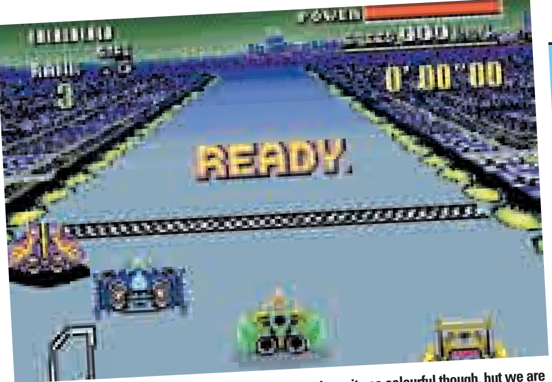
One of the Spectrum's most beloved platformers, *Jet Set Willy* offers a hefty challenge to this day, and its mix of exploration, item collection and wry comedy rightly struck a chord with gamers everywhere. The action takes place in the mansion of millionaire Willy who is forced by his housekeeper to tidy up after the massive party he's just held. He just wants to sleep, but its not tiredness he's up against, there are monsters, darts, pigs, you name it, Willy is up against it. Pure gaming nirvana.



He might be in black and white, but Link still has the same amount of steely determination and attitude as on the home machines.

73 Turrican

***Turrican* was certainly a high point in terms of graphics, in fact when it was unveiled many found it hard to believe that the colourful adventure was running on the home computer.** Later versions had even more impressive visuals and soundtracks. Gameplay-wise, it's similar to the arcade blasting action of *Contra* – but with more adventure elements – players are rewarded for exploring rather than just blasting through to the end. The game received many sequels, the best of which was *Super Turrican* on the SNES.



In the future, all races will look like this. It might not be quite so colourful though, but we are sure that there will be flying cars.

72 F-Zero

Taking racing into the future, Nintendo unleashed *F-Zero* in the early Nineties and it soon sped to the front of the racing game grid. As well as fast-paced gameplay, *F-Zero* boasted some stunning effects thanks to its use of Mode 7 technology, which created rotation and scaling effects that had never been seen in the home before.

This gave the game a simulated 3D environment, making others in the genre at the time seem flat by comparison. Of course the *F-Zero* franchise was resurrected to show off the technology inside the Game Boy Advance too, but it's the SNES version that we all remember most fondly.

71 Final Fight

It's a side-scrolling beat-'em-up classic from Capcom that comes in at number 71. *Final Fight* gives you the choice of three fighters to take control of as you traverse the mean streets of Metro City battling an evil street gang and attempting to save the mayor's daughter who has been kidnapped by the gang's nefarious leader.

Each of the three heroes, Haggar, Cody and Guy has their own distinct strengths and weaknesses, so gamers must choose either agility or strength. Of course, *Final Fight* is most remembered for its excellent two-player mode which remains one of the most enjoyable multiplayer thrills to date. And who can resist the chance to become the hero of a city?



You can tell when the Super Hero Convention hits town as the subway is full of all kinds of crazy freaks and weirdos.



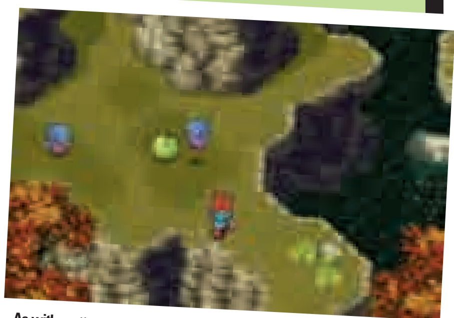
Something tells us that this will not actually be the final fantasy after all, not as long as fans keep putting their hands in their pockets.

70 Final Fantasy Tactics

***Tactics* may share the *Final Fantasy* name, but in terms of gameplay, it's a totally different animal.** *Final Fantasy Tactics* features a 3D isometric playing field which can be rotated. The game plays similarly to the *Tactics Ogre* series, thanks to sharing many of the team members who worked on the classic *Quest* adventures. The story concerns the Lion War in which there is an epic power battle after the king dies leaving no heir. (A classic RPG vehicle, then). The turn-based battling system rewards players who have a clear idea of their gameplay before heading to war as certain attack types work better in different situations. The game received a much lauded resurrection recently when it re-appeared on the GBA.

69 Chrono Trigger

***Chrono Trigger* helped revolutionise the genre by including different endings depending upon the character's actions.** The innovative battle system has been copied since, but rarely bettered. The story concerned a group of time travellers attempting to save the world by visiting the past (as far back as 65,000,000 BC) as well as the future. Starting life as a Super Nintendo favourite, *Chrono Trigger* was later reborn on the PSone.



As with pretty much every RPG out there, *Chrono Trigger* features not only expansive environments, but also impressive haircuts.



Oh the tension as one massive asteroid splits, only to create a multitude of smaller but equally deadly obstacles.



68 Asteroids

This classic space shooter sees you flying through an asteroid field, blasting debris that gets in your way. Upon hitting an asteroid it explodes into smaller pieces, making the field even more dangerous. Your ship shoots forward, so you have to rotate it to destroy asteroids. You also have the ability to Hyper Space if things get hairy – this can cause problems as you never know where you'll respawn. *Asteroids* was such a success that the cash boxes within the machines had to be made bigger as the they would often overflow.

67 Boulder Dash

It's unlikely that you went through your youth without coming across *Boulder Dash*. The game revolves around our hero Rockford and his attempts to dig through mines, collecting precious gems. As well as avoiding various creatures, he must make sure he doesn't get stuck under rocks or gems. *Boulder Dash* is such a simple idea, brilliantly executed. As well as being a classic Spectrum and 64 title, it's one of only a handful of games that went from home machines to the arcade rather than the other way around.

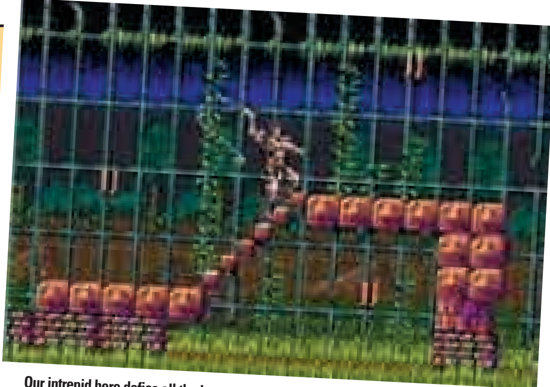


The further underground you go, the more treasure you'll find. But you're also more likely to get crushed under a rock.

66 Super Castlevania IV

When the *Castlevania* series made its SNES debut, fans were treated to the most epic and cinematic entry in the popular series so far. All the classic ingredients are here – the sweeping soundtrack, the old castle, vines and skeletons. Now, however, the backgrounds move and spin, the cameras focus in on the drama and the environments are more detailed than they've ever been.

It would be fair to point out that for most fans of the series, it is *Super Castlevania IV* and the original PlayStation's *Symphony Of The Night* that are the most revered, but surprisingly *Super Castlevania IV* is the only one to feature in our list.



Our intrepid hero defies all the laws of the world by trying to go up the down escalator. While carrying a whip.



Warning: Due to the excessive use of colour, *Frontier* may make you feel slightly nauseous. Just don't throw up on the keyboard, alright?



65 Frontier

That wonderful old adage that 'good things come to those who wait' certainly applies to *Frontier*, the eagerly anticipated sequel to the home computer classic *Elite*. Still, fans of the original kept the faith and *Frontier* surpassed all sales expectations when it arrived late in 1993.

The open-ended gameplay experience of *Frontier* means that gamers of all abilities can enjoy the stunning work of David Braben. The game starts you off in your run of the mill, average ship and through trading you must improve your standing and your craft. This amount of choice and fun stands out especially. If you want to kill you can, if you want to protect you can, in the expansive world of *Frontier*, anything is possible.

64 Space Harrier

***Space Harrier* began life as an arcade title, and as well as being a superb game was noted for the cabinet design which allowed gamers to sit down.** The machine would move around as you played (don't worry, there was a safety belt for when things got hairy).

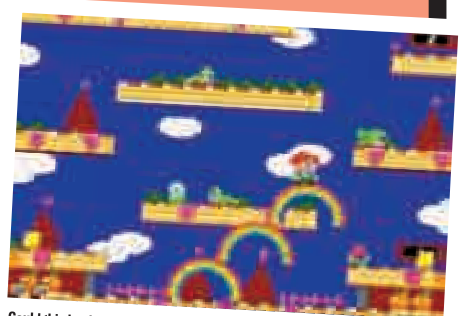
The game features some of the most colourful graphics of the era and the surreal world of dragons and aliens that comprised the 'Fantasy Zone' provided an exciting and dizzying shoot-'em-up adventure. The game appeared on most home formats, but special mention should go to the Master System which got not only a decent arcade conversion but also a 3D edition. Gameplay is simple, but by the end you need to employ fast reflexes.



A cool hero, a one-eyed dinosaur mammoth thing, robots with big guns, how many games can boast all of these?

63 Rainbow Islands

The intrepid heroes of *Bubble Bobble* return in this much-loved sequel that sees Bub and Bob rescuing the Rainbow Islands. The secret to victory here is creating rainbows which you can then jump on to reach greater heights to attack enemies. The levels are based upon some of Taito's greatest hits including *Arkanoid* and *Darius*. *Rainbow Islands* is a challenge with extremely tough bosses – despite the cutesy look, this is one tough cookie.



Could this be the cutest screenshot we have ever printed? Could be. Still, the game is deceptively challenging…



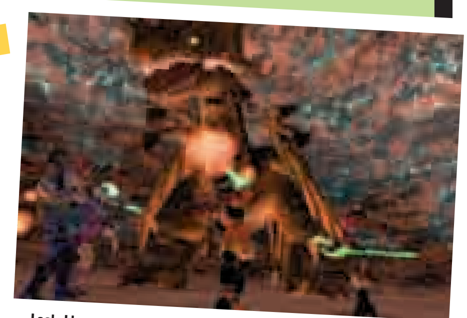
That's right, just stand there, put your hands into the air and let me kick you in the stomach. Take that, evil guy.

62 Kung Fu Master

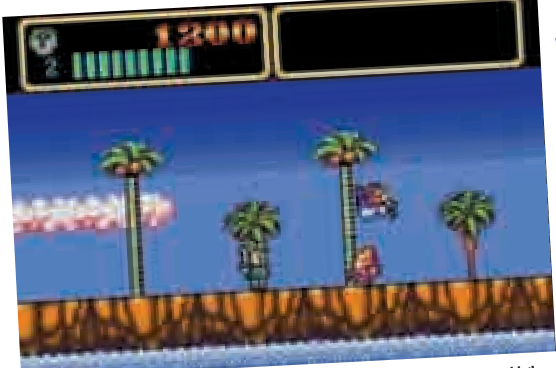
Typical, you take your girlfriend out for a stroll, then the next thing you know she's been captured by a mysterious Mr X and it's up to you to fight ninjas to win her back. You must make your way to the Devil's Temple and survive five floors of perilous danger. Your prize for defeating every foe on the floor is a tricky boss battle; defeat them, and you can ascend to the next floor before your eventual meeting with Mr X. Classic fighting action.

61 Phantasy Star Online

Released in Europe in 2001, *Phantasy Star Online* allows for four-player online action with fully customisable characters. A keyboard was released for the Dreamcast, which was perfect for *PSO* – there was also an on-screen keyboard as well as a number of pre-determined phrases for lazy gamers. Following the demise of Sega's dream machine, the series has turned up on GameCube and Xbox as well as the Game Boy Advance.



Look, I know you're probably a little annoyed about being attacked, but you're a giant dragon, we HAVE to kill you.



While he might not be quite as famous as Mario, Wonderboy is certainly up there with the plumber in the platform hero stakes.

Wonderboy III

60

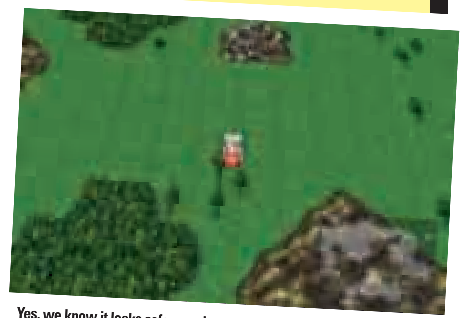
This is actually two games, and seeing as how votes did not specify which, we will have to doff our caps to both *Wonderboy III: The Monster's Lair* and also *Wonderboy III: The Dragon's Trap*.

Monster's Lair was the real third game in the series and as well as the usual *Wonderboy* ideas of running and jumping, it was also a side-scrolling shooter, confused? Many were. Then came, er, another third instalment, *The Dragon's Trap.* This time the game was a 'proper' sequel to *Super Wonderboy* in *Monster World* and features the same kind of gameplay seen in that classic adventure. One twist was the ability to change into various types of animals each of which had their own unique strengths.

Final Fantasy VI

59

***Final Fantasy VI* tells the tale of a world almost wiped out, and sees magic being phased out and technology ruling all.** This being *Final Fantasy*, a group is bringing magic back to the land and with it gaining the power… The title's misleading, as in the US this was *Final Fantasy 3* when released on the SNES whereas in Blighty we had to wait until it was released years later on the PSone. Still, it was worth the wait and remains a high point of the series.



Yes, we know it looks safe now, but we've played enough *Final Fantasy* to know there are monsters lurking nearby…



This remains one of the most stylish games we have ever played and regularly gets resurrected on our Dreamcast to this day.

Jet Set Radio

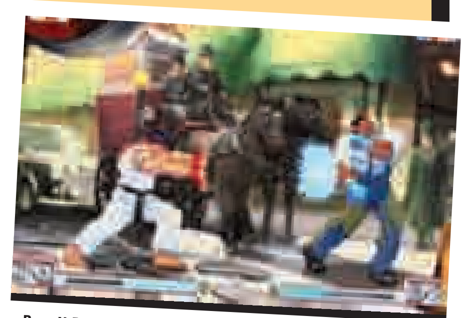
58

A Dreamcast cult treat with edge and attitude setting it apart from Sega's family orientated offerings. Released today, the moral majority – and Jack Thompson – would be all over *Jet Set Radio* as the story sees you skating around, marking the city with your graffiti tag as the police try to take you down. As well as innovative gameplay and an awesome soundtrack, *Jet Set Radio* employs cel-shading, giving it the futuristic look that the story dictates. The series wasn't continued before the death of the Dreamcast, but it was resurrected on Xbox.

Street Fighter 3

57

How do you follow up the zillion incarnations of *Street Fighter II*? Simple. Make the action more explosive and add elements such as new characters. As well as some brilliant fighting action, the game includes bonus stages which require you to smash up cars, or perform moves with basketballs. Ace animations and varied moves make this one of the best fighters out there and yet another triumph for Capcom's winning series



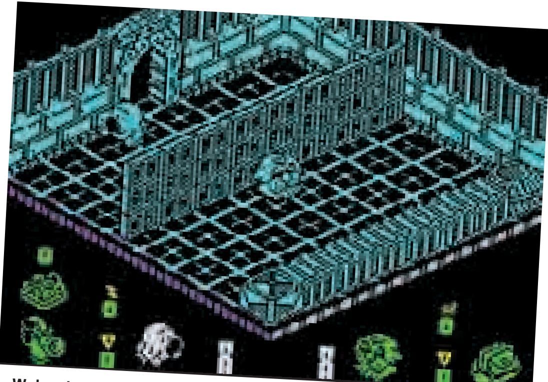
Press X, Press X, Press X, Press X, Left, Left, Right, Up, Down, Left, Left, X, Down, Right. FIREBALL!

Head Over Heels

56

The isometric brilliance of *Head Over Heels* is remembered as one of the Spectrum's finest moments. Never before did we have the chance to take control of two canine heroes, each with their own useful and unique abilities. To solve the puzzles, the dogs occasionally have to be combined, while at other times players need to work out which of the two has the ability to clear the screen. Often there are jumps that only Head can make, whereas Heels is the best for speed. Swapping between the two soon becomes second nature and there are few out there who will rest until all the puzzles have been solved.





We love dogs. We love games. Therefore we really love games featuring dogs, especially when they are as strange as this one…


Lock the door, turn off the clocks, hide your watch, once you start playing *StarCraft*, you may never see the real world again.



StarCraft 55

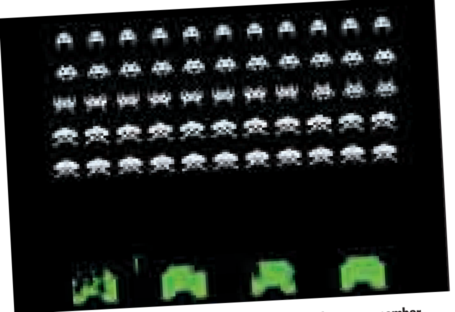
Blizzard's real-time strategy epic is one of the best-selling series of all time with over nine million copies sold since its introduction in 1998. While *StarCraft* obviously has similarities to the classic *WarCraft* series, a new game engine was created for the space adventure making this bigger and better than Blizzard's past successes. In order to gain victory in the world of *StarCraft* players must construct units and buildings and manage their resources properly as well as balancing offensive and defensive strengths.



Sensible Soccer 54

When Sensi exploded onto the Amiga and Atari ST in the early Nineties, it changed the genre forever. The tilted viewpoint differed from the topdown or sideline view that gamers were used to, editable teams meant that you could create your dream squad and, most importantly, gameplay was realistic. Nowadays it might be all *Pro Evo* vs *FIFA* but in the Nineties, *Sensible Soccer* ruled all. The question is how will the 2006 version fare? We'll see…


The action hits fever pitch as our two teams meet in the centre circle – something's about to kick off…


Where it all began, these were the first real villains we remember encountering in the arcade and they still give us nightmares.

Space Invaders 53

An unrelenting army marching towards Earth and not stopping until they've wiped out every human. *Space Invaders* was a smash hit, so much so that the US encountered a shortage of quarters as machines ate up the currency at an incredible rate. To track the game's success it's still being resurrected today with DS and PSP versions.

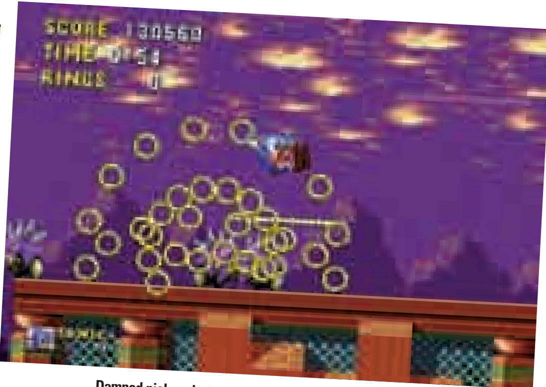

It might look like an out take from the Aztec Zone on *The Crystal Maze*, but it's actually another classic adventure for our hero. Not The Weakest 'Link'…

Majora's Mask 52

How do you follow up a game as perfect as *Ocarina Of Time*? Nintendo's response was Link's dark and moody return in *The Legend Of Zelda: Majora's Mask*. The sense of urgency throughout is palpable, with the game taking place over a three-day time frame. Like *Perfect Dark*, *Majora's Mask* uses the N64 expansion pack, giving the game a new level of graphical depth that helps increase the level of dread and suspense. By collecting masks, Link can perform tasks to help with his 72-hour quest, including the ability to spin and swim. Playing *Zelda* outside of Hyrule was a departure for the series, but *Majora's Mask* is another *Zelda* triumph and remains one of the N64's crowning moments.

Sonic The Hedgehog 51

We can't imagine a gaming landscape without Sega's mascot appearing in everything from racing games to 3D fighters. It was 1990 when Sega spawned a monster, trying to create a new mascot for the company and a character that could be as recognisable to gamers around the world as Nintendo's ubiquitous plumber. The result was Sonic, an attitude-filled animal who laid the blueprint for Crash, Blinx and a million other humourous animal heroes down the years. The original was a platformer like no other, not only was it tougher than most, it also had a sense of speed hitherto unseen. The game was an instant success, spawning sequels, spinoffs, toys, TV shows, you name it, Sega's probably stuck the hedgehog's face on it.



Damned pickpockets everywhere, that's the last time I come into town with my pockets full of swag…



SECRET OF MONKEY ISLAND [Various] US Gold 1990 – Original UK Advert



Share your views about old-school gaming

Retro Contact

First Contact

If you're into retro gaming and there's something that you would like to share with the rest of the world, why not write to us here at: games™ Retro Contact, Imagine Publishing Ltd, Richmond House, Richmond Hill, Bournemouth, Dorset, BH2 6EQ

OLD GOLD

Dear games™,

I love my Nintendo DS as it seems to have resurrected the idea of classic fun games bursting with colour (er, except for *Resident Evil* of course), and with the simple ability to put a smile upon your face – the success of *Nintendogs* is proof of this.

I wondered if there were any retro-style titles that have recently been released that I may have missed out on?

Terence Smith

Hmm… to be honest, we've been so busy playing *Animal Crossing* that many other DS titles may have passed us by. But not this classic pair of retro goodies: firstly *Bubble Bobble* has made a return and it's a treat to take control of Bub and Bob again – even if it's not quite as good as the original. Better still, one of the Amiga's greatest icons *James Pond* has been brought back to life in his Robocod form and not only is it as playable as ever, but it will cost you less than 20 notes. Bargain.

LIGHTS! CONSOLE! ACTION!

Dear games™,

I find it strange that when mining the world of videogame properties looking for suitable subjects for films, Hollywood seems to have ignored many of the obvious classics. I mean, look at games like *Commando* or *Contra* – these could easily be translated into dumb box office bubble gum, no doubt starring The Rock or Vinnie Jones.

By looking back into gaming's past, the silver screen could be filled with action flicks, the likes of which we've not seen since the heyday of Arnie and Stallone.

James Adler

Well, James, the irony at the moment seems to be that Hollywood is only interested in making movies based upon games which were influenced by films. So hopefully this should mean that we never have to tolerate sub-standard tie-in games, at least not until the *Pac-Man* movie rolls around. No, we're not making that up.

PINBALL WIZARD

Dear games™,

With all this talk of retro games of various types, one classic genre seems to get overlooked: the mighty world of pinball. While today these beauties are hardly ever seen in our local arcades, back in the day I remember every big property being given its own pinball machine.

Many of my favourite arcade games gave way to brilliant pinball extravaganzas – who can forget the creepy backdrop for the *Space Invaders* game or the bringing together of pinball and videogames with *Pac-Man Jr*? Even rock stars used to get in on the action with *Kiss Pinball* being a personal favourite.

Where are the new classics?

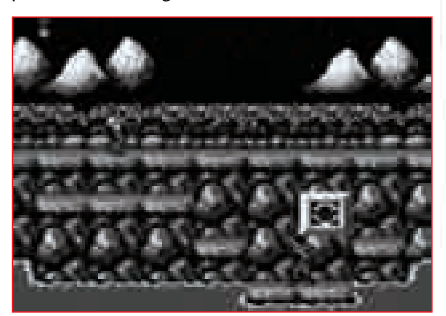
Sam Draper

Ah yes, we too remember these days fondly, but it seems that 'the kids' these days would prefer to put their cash into two-pence fruit machines than test their skills on a pinball table. Still, ironically, consoles are keeping the genre alive with most formats recently being graced with pinball conversions. Yes, we know it isn't the same, but it's better than nothing. If you've got the cash, you could always go on eBay to find yourself a classic table of your own. Or *Pinball Dreams Deluxe* on the GBA is definitely worth checking out.

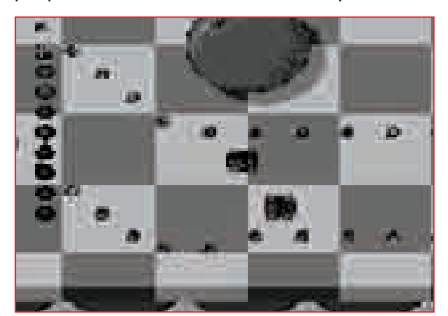
A SMALL IDEA

Dear games™,

Do you know what I'd like to see, **games™**? *Micro Machines* on the PSP – that's what. Wi-Fi *Micro Machines* is an absolute necessity in my opinion, and with the option of having two people hunched over each PSP, hilarity would



Just think about it – The Rock in a *Contra* movie. It'd work for sure.



Micro Machines for PSP? It would definitely liven up your coach trip.









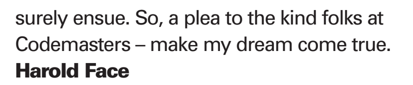
STAR LETTER

THIS IS YESTERDAY

Dear games™,
It seems that however much the software and hardware companies try and push us toward bigger and more complicated games, if you look at what is actually shifting units, it's the big games of yesteryear that are getting real game fans hot and bothered.

A good example of this is the recent launch of the Xbox 360. Now, don't get me wrong, it's an excellent machine, but it's not *Perfect Dark* or *Kameo* that is eating all of my spare time – it's the arcade classic *Smash TV* that cost me next to nothing. Basically, I seem to use my 360 as a legal emulator. It's the same tale with handhelds, the PSP already has its share of retro collections and the most anticipated DS game of recent times is *Resident Evil*, a remake of a PSone classic. Of course, this is all set to go to the next level with Nintendo's forthcoming Revolution console and the opportunity to download NES and SNES classics galore – no more trawling around the second-hand stores and eBay for that elusive NES puzzle game – we will be able to sit back and get it beamed to our living rooms. Now that's what I call *real* progress.
S Tolley

Yes, it does often seem strange to us that we are using all this powerful hardware to play *Asteroids*, but the point is that the real classic games stay around forever and so we should be celebrating that we finally have the technology to get our mitts on our favourite games with the minimal effort. Have a classic game on us, sir.



surely ensue. So, a plea to the kind folks at Codemasters – make my dream come true.
Harold Face

We have to agree with you there, *Micro Machines* is a classic 'on-the-move' title that would be perfect for the PSP. What we would ask Codemasters to do though, is release the classic Mega Drive version of the series, without trying to update it for a new generation – you just have to look at what it did to the series on the PSone to see the mistakes that can be made when you mess with the formula.

PLANET ROCK

Dear games™,
What happened to the days when rock stars got their own videogames and they were actually worth playing? Who can forget the quirky genius of Frankie Goes To Hollywood on the Spectrum, or Aerosmith rocking up the arcade with *Revolution X*? Nowadays, all we seem to have is tedious rappers living out their pathetic gun fantasies with no humour and no soul. Is it just that stars today aren't iconic enough to warrant being pixelated?
Julian Adams

Perhaps you're right about the iconic status of today's popsters. Whereas in the past, bands would take years to become huge, these days you really are famous for Warhol's 15 minutes and then gone again. So by the time programmers have finished pixelating your face, you could be on the scrapheap. Having said that, the aforementioned Frankie hit the top of the charts with its first single and went supernova in the space of two albums, so perhaps it's just that games have become more of a worldwide phenomenon and so only global stars like rapper 50 Cent get the console treatment. Any chance of an Arctic Monkeys RPG before the end of the year, EA?



Frankie Goes To Hollywood: The Game. And what a game it was.

WHO'S THE DADDY?

Dear games™,
I have spent the last few years dedicating most of my spare time to trying to become a world record holder on one of my favourite retro machines. I can always be found in my basement, attempting to crack *Joust*, *Bombjack* or *Asteroids* in my attempt to become the best in the world. How can I find out the scores that I need to beat in order to make the history books?
Nick Edwards

Your best port of call is the excellent twingalaxies.com, which reports on arcade championships from around the world and keeps gamers up to date with the latest challenges to beat. In order to become *Joust* champion, you will need to get a 100 per cent ranking and a score of over 107,216,700. Good luck with that, you'll need it.







BUYERS' GUIDE

It might be easy to play retro games through emulation, but there's nothing quite like owning the original system – that musty smell of ancient electronics can never really be replicated with a PC. Of course, there's always a price to pay and unscrupulous dealers are out to make a quick buck, but you really don't have to pay through the nose if you look in the right places. Charity shops, car boot sales and eBay are all good places to start, but before you do, use our guide to see how much you should be paying…

3DO

Panasonic 3DO £60
Goldstar 3DO £50-60

ACORN COMPUTERS

BBC Micro £50
Acorn Electron £40

AMSTRAD

Amstrad CPC 464 £10-25
Amstrad CPC 664 £20-25
Amstrad CPC 6128 £25
Amstrad GX4000 £15-30



ATARI

Atari VCS 2600 £30 (wooden models tend to cost more)
Atari ST £40 (with software)
Atari Lynx £15
Atari Jaguar £20-30

COMMODORE

Commodore Vic 20 £15-20
Commodore 64 £25-35 (varies according to model)
Commodore Amiga £35-40 (varies according to model)
Commodore CDTV £50-60
C64GS £50 (becoming more sought-after)
Commodore CD32 £35



MISC

GCE Vectrex (General Consumer Electronics) £70-250
MB Vectrex (Milton Bradley) £175-200
JAMMA compatible cabinets £100-350 (depending on model)
Supergun £150-200 (varies according to model)

NEC

PC Engine £50-100
Turbo Grafx-16 £50-60
Turbo Duo £115-220
PC Engine GT £50-150
Super Grafx £200-300



NINTENDO

Game & Watch £10-200 (depending on title)
Nintendo Entertainment System £15-20
Game Boy/Game Boy Pocket £10
Game Boy Color £15
Super Nintendo £20-40
Virtual Boy £75-100
Nintendo 64 £20-25

SEGA

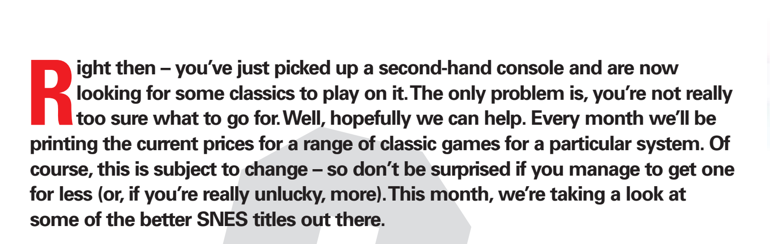
Master System £20-40
Mega Drive £10-20
Game Gear £10-25
Mega CD £40-60
Sega 32X £30
Sega Nomad £75-150
Saturn £20-35 (depending on model)
Dreamcast £20-40

SINCLAIR

Sinclair ZX-81 £40
ZX Spectrum 48K £40-50
ZX Spectrum + £30
ZX Spectrum 128K £40
ZX Spectrum +2 £35
ZX Spectrum +3 £40

SNK

Neo-Geo MVS Single Slot (arcade system) £70 (prices for multi-slots are higher)
Neo-Geo AES (home system) £175-225
Neo-Geo CD £125-175
Neo-Geo CDZ £150-175
Neo-Geo Pocket Color £30-50





Right then – you've just picked up a second-hand console and are now looking for some classics to play on it. The only problem is, you're not really too sure what to go for. Well, hopefully we can help. Every month we'll be printing the current prices for a range of classic games for a particular system. Of course, this is subject to change – so don't be surprised if you manage to get one for less (or, if you're really unlucky, more). This month, we're taking a look at some of the better SNES titles out there.

Pop 'N' Twinbee

Estimated Price: £8
Developer: Konami

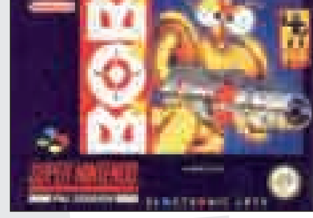
If you are a diabetic then it may not be entirely safe for you to venture out into the world of *Pop 'N' Twinbee*. It really is the most colourful and super-sickly-sweet game ever to escape from Japan. Add in a totally bonkers story line, a soundtrack that drills into your brain and refuses to leave and you have yourself an adventure that no description can do justice to. The side-scrolling platform action may be a slight diversion from the usual vertical shmup style that fans were used to, but it still stands out as a great experience all round.



BOB

Estimated Price: £3
Developer: Electronic Arts

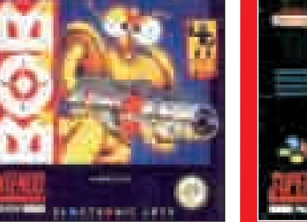
One minute you're a robot minding your own business driving through space, the next you have gone and crash-landed on one of those 'strange and mysterious' planets that game developers are so keen on. *BOB* is a very tricky platformer which pits you against not just enemies, but also the clock, as you attempt to speed through the levels. Luckily *BOB* has a number of weapons at his disposal and a space pod to travel across the landscapes. Imagine a cartoon version of the mighty *Short Circuit* and you're somewhere near *BOB*.



Bart's Nightmare

Estimated Price: £6
Developer: Acclaim

If there is one thing you could always be sure of, it's that any game revolving around *The Simpsons* franchise will be, at best, a bit rubbish and at worst, completely unplayable. So imagine the SNES-owning fans' surprise when *Bart's Nightmare* turned out to be an entertaining and humourous Bart adventure. The story, as the title cunningly suggests, sees Bart falling asleep and dreaming that he is in various action adventures, where he plays Bartman and Bartzilla amongst other classic icons. Still the best *Simpsons* game ever, we say.



ActRaiser 2

Estimated Price: £15
Developer: Enix America Inc.

Following on from the original RPG classic, *ActRaiser 2* takes more of an action-orientated stance with players having the opportunity to save various towns from a number of very dangerous demons. While it may lack the intricate story line of the original game, it does feature some truly excellent graphics – for the time, it looked more than a little impressive. The somewhat mindless gameplay also means that it is not just for the RPG addicts out there either, so that's a bonus in itself…



Axelay

Estimated Price: £12
Developer: Konami

Classic shooting action, pure unadulterated joy. Of course as well as looking fantastic, *Axelay* was also incredibly tough. However, like all the best shmups, if you died then you really felt like it was your own fault, meaning you would instantly pick up the pad to fly into space one more time. As with *R-Type* and other favourites in the genre, there are a number of truly grotesque and nightmarish creatures that you will come up against and only the fastest of trigger-fingers will see you through to the final credits.



Alien 3

Estimated Price: £8
Developer: Acclaim

Yes, we are aware that the majority of movie tie-ins are not worth the cartridges they are burnt onto, but *Alien 3* is in the smallest of minorities – games that are actually better than the movie that it is based on. Unlike the rather dull film version, *Alien 3* the game had suspense and the occasional moment of heartstopping horror and it really did feel as if you were fighting for your life against the worst that space could offer. We would advise you to play it with the lights on. Unless you're super-hardcore, of course.



Super Tennis

Estimated Price: £5
Developer: Nintendo

Okay, so every console has a slew of tennis titles, but few have really reached the entertainment levels offered by Nintendo's brilliant *Super Tennis*. The learning curve of this sports sim gem is perfect and by the time you have got to grips with your virtual racket and your moves on the court, you will find yourself up against some truly impressive and legendary challengers. The only downside that we can possibly think of for this sporting epic is the massive passwords that have to be typed in if you want to continue.

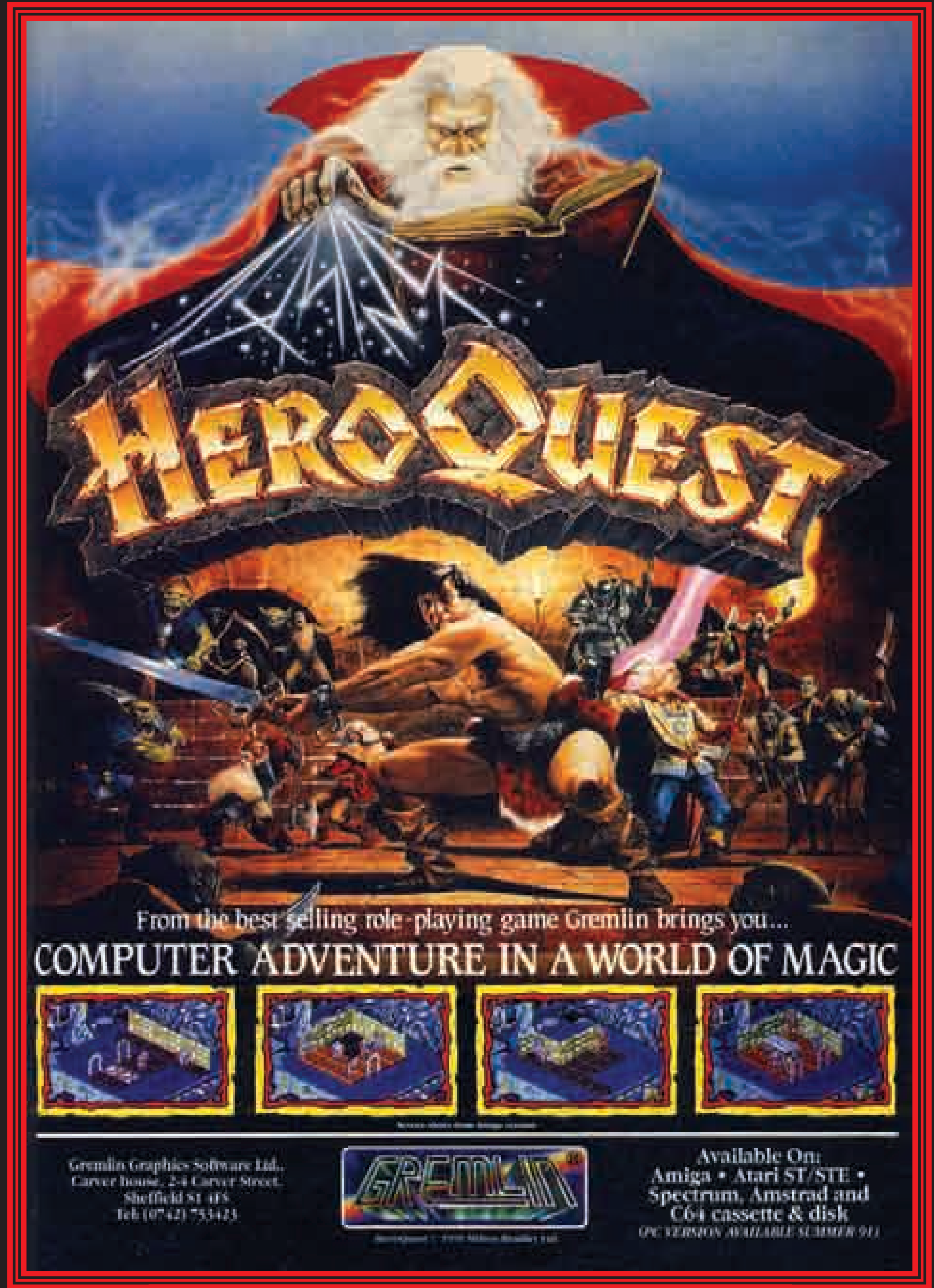


Super Star Wars

Estimated Price: £9
Developer: LucasArts

This could be regarded as one of the best interpretations of Lucas' classic movie series, the SNES version followed the storyline of the film perfectly and thus included all of the classic environments from Tatooine to Mos Eisley. As well as authenticity, the game displayed some of the Super Nintendo's best graphics and there can be few sci-fi fans disappointed by playing this fabulous title. However, if you are feeling a little bit flush, you could always splash out on *The Empire Strikes Back* and *The Return Of The Jedi* too.





HERO QUEST [Various] Gremlin, 1991 – Original UK Advert


eMag

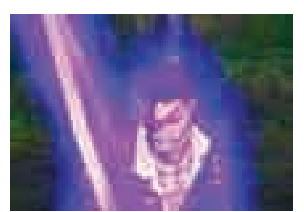
ESSENTIALS

TOO MANY GAMES, NOT ENOUGH MONEY. THANKFULLY, NOT ALL OF THEM ARE WORTH SPENDING YOUR HARD-



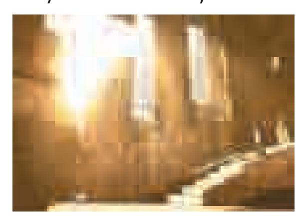
ROGUE GALAXY

We have an appreciation for the skill that Level-5 has when it comes to making RPGs, but it still amazes us how it keeps bettering itself every time. The latest effort is something truly special and absolutely mammoth to boot; we can't wait for the US release.



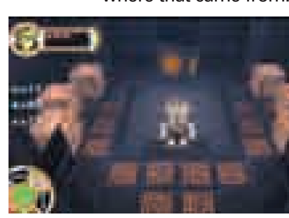
ICO

As you read this, Sony has performed a miracle by deciding to re-release one of our favourite PS2 games. It's elegant, soulful and downright beautiful… we've told you that enough times, so now's your chance to go and buy it if you haven't already. Go. Now.



TOKOBOT

It's about time that the PSP got something other than the usual PS2-to-PSP franchise releases. Tecmo's *Pikmin*-esque robot adventure might not be overly complicated, but it's a whole lot of fun – let's hope there's more where that came from.





PLAYSTATION2

Manufacturer Sony
UK Launch Date 24 November 2000
Media 4.75-inch DVD Disc
Current Price £104.99

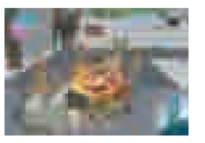
The oldest of the next-generation consoles, having had well over a year's head start over both the GameCube and Xbox. Thanks to Sony's reputation, though, it's still the most popular console around – a trend that will no doubt continue now that the remodelled, one-quarter-size PStwo is available in both traditional black and 'special' silver.

TWENTY MUST-HAVE PLAYSTATION2 GAMES

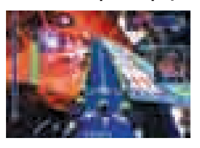
Title	Publisher	Developer	Comment
Amplitude	Sony	Harmonix	Music games have never needed as much skill as this
Beyond Good & Evil	Ubisoft	In-House	A fine example of adventuring; well worth the wait
Devil May Cry 3	Capcom	In-House	Hard as nails but certainly the highlight of the series
Disgaea: Hour Of Darkness	Atlus	Nippon Ichi	Like your RPGs practically endless? Then this is for you
Dragon Quest VIII IMPORT	Sony	Level-5	Old-school RPG action taken to a visually awesome level
God Of War	Sony	In-House	Sony's answer to *Devil May Cry* is a godly delight
Gran Turismo 4	Sony	Polyphony Digital	Worth the wait, thankfully – even without the online mode
Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas	Rockstar Games	Rockstar North	Bigger, badder, better – a great *GTA* experience
Guitar Hero IMPORT	Red Octane	Harmonix	Great rock anthems, even greater rock gameplay
Ico	SCEE	In-House	Possibly the most beautiful game ever made
Makai Kingdom	Koei	Nippon Ichi	Another example of why Nippon Ichi rules the RPG world
Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater	Konami	In-House	Flawed genius, but genius nevertheless
Prince Of Persia: Sands Of Time	Ubisoft	In-House	The original still reigns for style and substance
Rez	Sega	UGA	Deceptively simple – draws you in before you know it
Shadow Of The Colossus	Sony	In-House	So simple and yet such an absorbingly beautiful game
Soul Calibur III	Sony	Namco	Polishes the franchise's sword until it gleams
SSX On Tour	Electronic Arts	EA Sports BIG	A great refinement that enhances the series further
Tony Hawk's Underground 2	Activision	Neversoft	Better? Again? How does Neversoft keep doing it?
Virtua Fighter 4: Evolution	Sega	In-House	By far the deepest 3D fighting game around today
We Love Katamari	Namco	In-House	Just as quirky as the original, which makes it brilliant

WHY YOU SHOULD OWN…

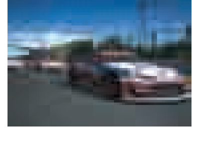
We Love Katamari
Finally out on European shores. Why it's taken so long is a mystery, but we won't dwell on that one…



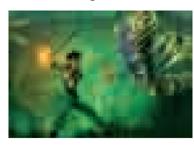
Amplitude
Yes, *Guitar Hero* is coming, but until then, there's still always Harmonix's last musical masterpiece to play.



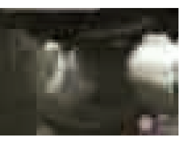
Gran Turismo 4
High-speed racing with a realistic edge – as close as you'll get without putting your body and motor at real risk.



Beyond Good & Evil
Come on, Ubisoft, you know you want to make a sequel. You can't just leave us hanging on a knife-edge like this…



Shadow Of The Colossus
Why should you own it? Just because… that's why. If you don't believe us, then you don't deserve to play it.









EARNED CASH ON. IF YOU WANT TO TASTE THE CREAM OF THE CROP, YOU'VE COME TO THE RIGHT PLACE



XBOX

Manufacturer Microsoft
UK Launch Date
13 March 2002
Media
4.75-inch DVD Disc
Current Price £99.99

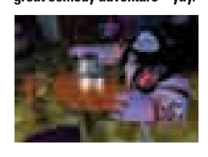
Despite a slow start, the Xbox has swiftly become one of the major players in today's console market. Suggestions that the machine is only 'a PC in a box' are founded, although the Xbox is far more accessible to gamers than most PCs. Despite the recent release of the Xbox 360, Microsoft will be supporting the console until at least 2007.

TWENTY MUST-HAVE XBOX GAMES

Title	Publisher	Developer	Comment
Battlefield 2: Modern Combat	Electronic Arts	DICE	Online and off, this is the definitive console shooter
Burnout Revenge	EA Games	Criterion Studios	Another high-speed smash of a success for Criterion
Chronicles Of Riddick: Butcher Bay	Vivendi Universal	Starbreeze Studios	A fine example of great gameplay and top-notch graphics
Def Jam: Fight For New York	Electronic Arts	Aki Corporation	Ultra-violent fighting has never looked so good
Fable	Microsoft	Big Blue Box	A special breed of RPG – well worth experiencing
Fahrenheit	Atari	Quantic Dream	A hauntingly beautiful and intriguing adventure game
Forza Motorsport	Microsoft	In-House	No *GT4* comparisons – just a solid Xbox racing title
Jet Set Radio Future	Sega	Smilebit	Cel-shading at its very best and a soundtrack to die for
Star Wars: Knights Of The Old Republic	Activision	BioWare	One of the best *Star Wars* games ever made
Ninja Gaiden Black	Microsoft	Tecmo	Damn tough, but a great example of style and gameplay
Oddworld: Stranger's Wrath	Electronic Arts	Oddworld Inhabitants	A complete change of pace for *Oddworld* that really works
OutRun 2	Sega	Sumo Digital	Stunning reproduction of a great arcade game
Pro Evolution Soccer 5	Konami	In-House	The only football game worth owning, period
Project Zero	Microsoft	Tecmo	Scarier than anything else out there today
Psi-Ops: The Mindgate Conspiracy	Midway	In-House	An enjoyable and solid psychic blasting romp
Psychonauts	Majesco	Double Fine	Wonderfully unique and enjoyable, if a little short
Rainbow Six 3: Black Arrow	Ubisoft	In-House	An essential update to the hugely popular Live game
Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory	Ubisoft	In-House	The best *Splinter Cell* yet, thanks to the co-op mode
Street Fighter Anniversary Collection	Capcom	In-House	The greatest collection of fighting games ever? Oh, hell yes
TimeSplitters: Future Perfect	Electronic Arts	Free Radical	An infinitely expanding universe of online blasting action

WHY YOU SHOULD OWN...

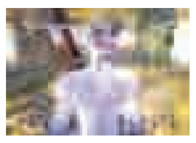
Psychonauts
At last, it's been released. THQ has finally pulled its finger out and given us Tim Schafer's great comedy adventure – yay.



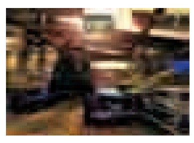
OutRun2
The 'sequel' is due out in March, but until then there's still plenty of fun to be had with the original arcade port.



Fable
Why is being good always so hard? It's not like we want to take the dark path… it's just so damned tempting.



Burnout Revenge
Yes, we're annoyed – there's a 360 version on the way and we'll have to start all over again. Damn you, EA.



Chronicles Of Riddick
The film: a bag of arse. The game: a really good first-person adventure that puts unarmed combat to good use.






games™ VIEWPOINT

GAUNTLET: SEVEN SORROWS

Given that we've been playing *Gauntlet* to death over Xbox Live Arcade, it makes the failings in Midway's latest take on the brand all the more obvious. It's not that it's bad, it's just very… well, bland. At least the multiplayer's a laugh.



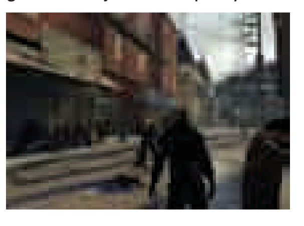
STUBBS THE ZOMBIE IN: REBEL WITHOUT A PULSE

Humour is incredibly subjective – we've read countless tales of *Stubbs The Zombie* being 'not funny', not to mention people berating the gameplay. But it's really not that bad; certainly not perfect, but fun nonetheless.



HALF-LIFE 2

Disappointment, thy name is the Xbox conversion of *Half-Life 2*. Perhaps we were a little naive to expect something better but, having played the PC version to death, the reduction in visual quality really hurts. Same great game then, just not as pretty.



ESSENTIALS

TOO MANY GAMES, NOT ENOUGH MONEY. THANKFULLY, NOT ALL OF THEM ARE WORTH SPENDING YOUR HARD-



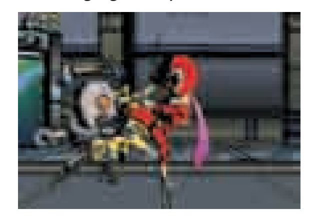
METROID PRIME PINBALL

We're suckers for a good pinball game, so imagine our surprise when *Metroid Prime Pinball* turned out to be really rather good. With decent physics and great *Metroid* stylings, Fuse has pulled it off. It's like *Super Mario Ball* never happened.



VIEWTIFUL JOE: DOUBLE TROUBLE

After last month's disappointing *Red Hot Rumble*, it's good to see the 'viewtiful' hero returning to form on the DS. It's a tad fiddly, using the touch screen along with the D-pad, but the game's still as challenging as any other *Joe* title.



MARIO PARTY 7

Okay, that's enough. No, really – *that's enough*. Mario's shindigs have been fairly enjoyable in the past, but now it's just becoming more obvious that the ideas are running out… it's not even much fun any more. We hate to say it but please, Nintendo, stop now.





GAMECUBE

Manufacturer Nintendo
UK Launch Date 3 May 2002
Media 3-inch Optical Disc
Current Price £79.99

Though the GameCube seems destined to struggle, Nintendo's box of delights is still worth a look. While third-party support is dwindling, it's the first-party releases that really offer some quality gaming. Nintendo still makes some of the finest games ever, so missing out isn't really an option if you love videogames.

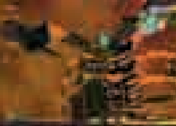
TWENTY MUST-HAVE GAMECUBE GAMES

Title	Publisher	Developer	Comment
Animal Crossing	Nintendo	In-House	The only game to keep us playing for a full year
Alien Hominid IMPORT	03 Entertainment	The Behemoth	Hardcore 2D blasting with a sense of humour
Chibi-Robo IMPORT	Nintendo	Skip	Charming miniature robot fun – simple but effective
Eternal Darkness	Nintendo	Silicon Knights	Scary in a different sense – very intriguing
F-Zero GX	Nintendo	Amusement Vision	Sega does it again with a brilliant retro remake
Harvest Moon: A Wonderful Life	Ubisoft	Natsume	Highly absorbing – the *Animal Crossing* of farming games
Ikaruga	Treasure	In-House	Hard as nails and incredibly addictive
killer7	Capcom	In-House	As arty as it is challenging – truly weird and wonderful
Mario Golf: Toadstool Tour	Nintendo	Camelot	Golfing fun without the need for Tiger Woods
Mario Kart: Double Dash!!	Nintendo	In-House	A grower, by all accounts – take your time and enjoy
Metroid Prime 2: Echoes	Nintendo	In-House	Another great 3D outing for our favourite female bounty hunter
Paper Mario: The Thousand Year Door	Nintendo	Intelligent Systems	Hugely entertaining and challenging at the same time
Pikmin 2	Nintendo	In-House	More flowery fun for those of a patient disposition
Resident Evil 4	Capcom	In-House	Reinvention on a scale that brings the series back to life
Soul Calibur II	Namco	In-House	The leader of the pack when it comes to swordplay
Super Mario Sunshine	Nintendo	In-House	Not perfect, but still a very fine *Mario* adventure
Super Monkey Ball 2	Sega	Amusement Vision	Monkeys and balls – what more could you want?
Tales Of Symphonia	Namco	In-House	An absolute beast of an RPG that will dominate your life
Viewtiful Joe 2	Capcom	In-House	A fine return for our favourite side-scrolling superhero
Zelda: The Wind Waker	Nintendo	In-House	Far better than its clueless detractors will have you believe

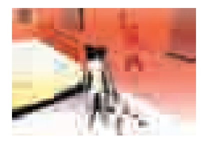
WHY YOU SHOULD OWN…

Viewtiful Joe 2
It's not hard – you're just rubbish. Polish those red-hot skills and maybe you'll see the end credits sometime soon.

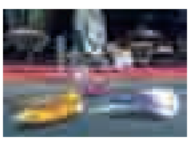
Zelda: The Wind Waker
The end might not have satisfied, but the visuals certainly do. A beautiful game in every single way.



killer7
Arty as hell, bloody difficult and incredibly hard to make sense of… and yet, we love this game to bloody pieces.



F-Zero GX
Best wear some goggles when playing this, unless you fancy seeing your eyeballs splattered all over the screen.



Pikmin 2
How can you resist the charm of the Pikmin? They're so cute, and ordering them to their dooms is such fun.









EARNED CASH ON. IF YOU WANT TO TASTE THE CREAM OF THE CROP, YOU'VE COME TO THE RIGHT PLACE

GBA

Manufacturer Nintendo **UK Launch Date** 22 June 2001
Media Flash Cartridge **Current Price** £69.99



Ideal for gaming on the move, the GBA is a cheap and effective way of getting games to those who don't have time to sit down and play. The leaps in handheld technology mean that GBA games can be compared favourably to their console-based cousins. The lovely SP model is available in a variety of colours, while the even more diminutive Micro is also out to buy now.

TWENTY MUST-HAVE GAME BOY ADVANCE GAMES

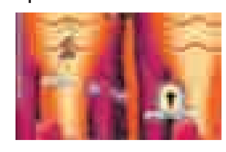
Title	Publisher	Developer
Advance Wars 2: Black Hole Rising	Nintendo	In-House
Astro Boy: Omega Factor	Sega	Treasure
Boktai: The Sun Is In Your Hand	Konami	In-House
Castlevania: Aria Of Sorrow	Konami	In-House
Final Fantasy Tactics Advance	Nintendo	Square Enix
Fire Emblem: The Sacred Stones	Nintendo	In-House
Golden Sun: The Lost Age	Nintendo	Camelot
Harvest Moon: Friends Of Mineral Town	Ubisoft	Natsume
Mario & Luigi: Superstar Saga	Nintendo	AlphaDream
Mario Golf: Advance Tour	Nintendo	Camelot
Mario Vs Donkey Kong	Nintendo	In-House
Metroid: Zero Mission	Nintendo	In-House
Pokémon Pinball: Ruby And Sapphire	Nintendo	In-House
Pokémon Emerald	Nintendo	In-House
Shining Force: Resurrection Of The Dark Dragon	THQ	Sega
Street Fighter Alpha 3 Upper	Ubisoft	Crawfish
Super Mario Advance 3: Yoshi's Island	Nintendo	In-House
WarioWare: Twisted!	Nintendo	In-House
Legend Of Zelda: A Link To The Past/Four Swords	Nintendo	In-House
Legend Of Zelda: The Minish Cap	Nintendo	Capcom

WHY YOU SHOULD OWN...

Astro Boy: Omega Factor
■ **A hugely overlooked adventure that deserves your attention. Never has the robotic boy been so playable.**



Mario Vs Donkey Kong
■ **A slight diversion for our favourite plumber, but one that's both enjoyable and frustrating in equal measure.**



Street Fighter Alpha 3 Upper
■ **Okay, so it's on the PSP as well… but seeing as it's difficult to play on Sony's handheld, we'd still plump for the GBA version any time.**



PC

Manufacturer N/A **UK Launch Date** N/A
Media 4.75-inch CD/DVD Disc **Current Price** £variable



While primarily bought as a work platform, the PC has swiftly become the haven of the more 'mature' gamer. With its natural ability for online and LAN play, it's perfectly tailored for the FPS, strategy and MMORPG genres. However, it can cost a fortune to keep a PC up to date and running fast enough to support flashy graphics and other special effects.

TWENTY MUST-HAVE PC GAMES

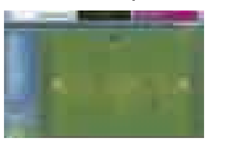
Title	Publisher	Developer
Battlefield 2	Electronic Arts	Digital Illusions
City Of Heroes	NCsoft	Cryptic Studios
Far Cry	Ubisoft	Crytek
Football Manager 2005	Sega	Sports Interactive
Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas	Rockstar Games	Rockstar North
Grim Fandango	LucasArts	In-House
GTR – FIA GT Racing Game	Atari	SimBin Development
Guild Wars	NCSoft	ArenaNet
Half-Life 2	Vivendi	Valve Software
Joint Operations: Typhoon Rising	NovaLogic	In-House
Pro Evolution Soccer 4	Konami	In-House
Rise Of Nations	Microsoft	Big Huge Games
Rome: Total War	Activision	Creative Assembly
Sam & Max Hit The Road	Activision	LucasArts
Sensible World Of Soccer	Sensible Software	Renegade
Sid Meier's Pirates!	Atari	Firaxis Games
The Movies	Activision	Lionhead Studios
The Sims 2	Electronic Arts	Maxis
Unreal Tournament 2004	Atari	Epic Games
World Of Warcraft	Vivendi	Blizzard

WHY YOU SHOULD OWN...

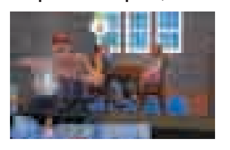
Grim Fandango
■ **Proof of several things: point and click adventures were ace, Tim Schafer's a genius and death isn't as scary as he looks.**



Football Manager 2005
■ **Still king of the hill despite having to invent a new brand – Sports Interactive rules the simulation roost. Okay?**



The Sims 2
■ **Out on virtually every format ever made now, it still remains at its best on the PC (despite those over-priced add-on packs).**



PERIPHERALS

EACH CONSOLE HAS THOSE MUST-HAVE PERIPHERALS – CAN YOU KEEP YOUR HANDS OFF THEM?

XBOX 360 PLAY AND CHARGE KIT



Console: Xbox 360
From: Microsoft
Price: £14.99
Available: Now

Chances are, if you've got yourself an Xbox 360, you opted for the Premium pack (given that it outsold the Core version by two to one) and are therefore enjoying the benefits of wireless control. If you'd like to eliminate batteries from the equation altogether, there's this rather nifty option to save yourself a few pennies in the long term. While it connects a powered 360 and a controller equipped with the rechargeable battery pack, this magical lead (at least, we assume it's powered by magic) juices up your pad without the need to throw money at Duracell every few weeks. So, once you've used your wired controller for a bit, the red light blinks out and you're good to go wireless again, you can toss the lead to one side and kick back without worrying about tripping people up.



LOGITECH CORDLESS ACTION CONTROLLER

WIRE-FREE GAMING AT ITS BEST

Console: PlayStation2
From: Logitech
Price: £29.99
Available: Now

There probably isn't an experienced gamer out there who is not familiar with the risks associated with third-party peripherals. Over the years, we have had more than our fair share of short-lived memory cards and dodgy controllers that have taught us the benefits of the few extra pounds you spend to go official. Over the last year or so, though, a few companies have really picked up their game and Logitech is one such firm.

This wireless controller still relies on batteries to keep it powered, but with a respectable lifespan and no noticeable lag, this is easily one of the better cordless controllers on the market. Design-wise, this is perhaps the next best thing to one of the official DualShock 2 pads. If you fancy a cable-free room and don't mind shelling out for batteries every month or so, this is about as recommendable a third-party controller as you'll see.

JOYTECH NITRO TRIFORCE 3-IN-1 WHEEL

PERFECT FOR RACING THRILLS

Console: Multiformat
From: Joytech
Price: £59.99
Available: Now

If you're a fan of proper racing games like *Gran Turismo*, *Forza* or *GT-R*, then chances are that you would relish the chance to play these simulation-inclined racers on a decent wheel. Joytech's latest effort is just that and better still, it's designed to work for PC, PlayStation2 and Xbox, making it that much more of a shrewd investment. With all the functionality of the previous Joytech offerings and a few natty extra to boot (not to mention a name that may well see Link sending for Hyrule's finest lawyers), this is a great alternative for those that can't afford to drop a hundred notes on Logitech's GT4 wheel. Force feedback and multi-console support arguably make this Joytech peripheral the better option for those with several machines that they'd like to go driving with. Just don't try and use it for *Burnout* – we got our first sixth place in months when we tried it. Stick to those more realistic racers, though, and this couldn't work better. Well worth the asking price.




eMag



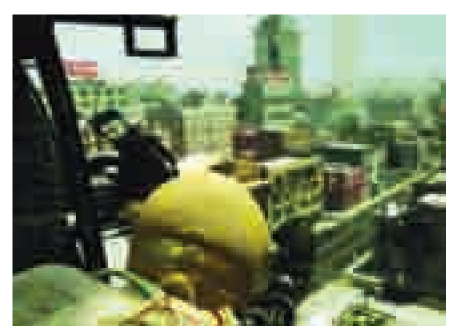
NEXT MONTH IN GAMES™

TOMB RAIDER: LEGEND

It's finally here. games™ delivers the definitive verdict on Lara's comeback – will she rule the world once again?

180 PAGES OF GOOD LOOKING GAMES

NEXT MONTH

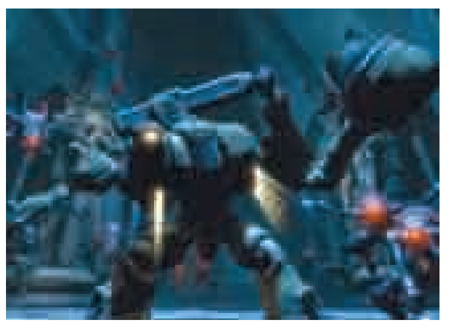


Get ready for some sharp shooting. Find out how we get on with *Ghost Recon* next month.

MORE… REVIEWS

Now that the rush of the Xbox 360 has died down, things have been suspiciously quiet for Microsoft's console. Mercifully, this is all about to change as we bring you the definititve verdicts on *Fight Night Round 3* and *Ghost Recon: Advanced Warfighter*, along with the long-awaited verdict on the rejuvenated Lara Croft in *Tomb Raider: Legend*.

"ADVANCED WARFIGHTER IS A NEXT-GEN TITLE IN MORE THAN JUST NAME"

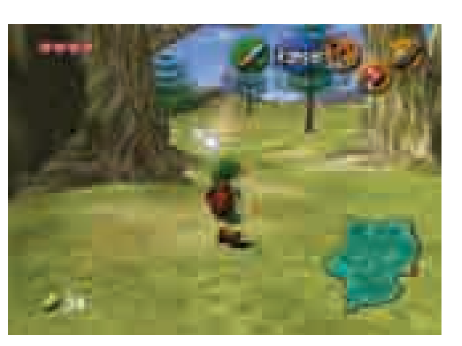


The machines are coming. But just how are we going to 'fry their circuits'?

MORE… PREVIEWS

Now that the disappointment at not finding a 360 under the tree this Christmas fades into a distant memory, it's time to scan our radar for the games that are going to rock the back end of 2006. With *Too Human* on Xbox 360, *Virtua Tennis 3* on the arcade, *Mortal Kombat Armageddon* on everything, there's already plenty to whet your gaming appetite.

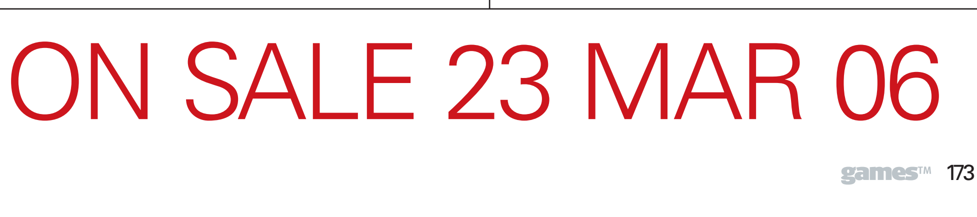
"DON'T SHOOT THE MESSENGER, REMEMBER IT'S YOUR LIST"



There may be a few surprises at the top of your 100 Greatest Retro Games chart. Check it out.

MORE… FEATURES

It feels like it's taken forever, but issue 42 of **games™** will finally reveal your Top 50 retro games of all time. So what will take that coveted number one spot? After the bickering about the games that didn't make it dies down, there'll still be time to check out a full tour of Capcom's studios from our trip to the Far East, plus an exclusive interview with Mr Sid Meier.



CONTACT

ILLUMINATING THE WORLD OF games™

Enough of what we think – now you get to show off your rapier wit to praise, criticise or mock the games industry. Or not…

DID YOU SEE the charts over Christmas? As people who play games all the time, I'm sure you'll appreciate that they were a little bleak. I wasn't really surprised when, on Christmas morning, the presents I received from my family were all games. They weren't just any old games, however, these were games that were standing proud at the top of the charts.

In order to not ruin the surprise, rather than asking which titles I was keen to own, my family took advice from the 'reliable' charts. I won't pick on any title in particular, but let's just say that a few of the games I received were quite poor.

I'm not an ungrateful person. I'm extremely happy that I was considered by my family and that they attempted, with the best intentions, to buy a gift that I'd be happy with. My anger is with the publishers that use promotion to get their games to the top of the charts, and then prey on people who know no better. The worst bit is that I can't even trade in the games I'm displeased with. Life is so cruel.

Luke Peterson

games™: There's famine in Africa, which we hate, and you're complaining about getting loads of Christmas presents. Unbelievable. The thing is, how can you question a savvy publisher for promoting its product? In the end, it's a business, and the publishers want to make money. Next year, produce a solid Christmas list for your family, or shut up and stop whinging.

I'M WELL AWARE that there are plenty of people complaining about the unavailability of the Xbox 360 at the moment, but I really couldn't be more annoyed. I've never had a console on launch day before due to a low income, but I was ready this time. I had the money. I had the pre-order. A 360 should have been mine. A month has passed now, and I still don't have one. I ask you, what is the point? Why launch a console that nobody can buy? Did Microsoft think a few months lead on Sony so important, that it's willing to upset much of its loyal fan base?

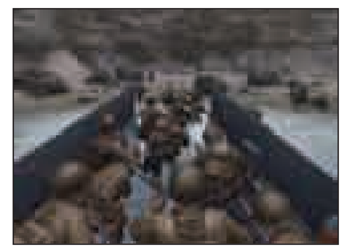
The news that I'd have to wait until mid-February, even with my pre-order, was met with my decision not to bother at all – it's really not worth the hassle. Maybe somewhere down the line I'll pick one up, but for now Microsoft has lost my custom.

James Edwards

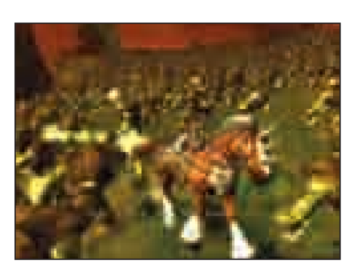
games™: It's a fair point, but there's no denying the fact that the failure to supply demand, and the hype preceding this, has caused the games-buying public to be whipped into a 360 fervour. While it's annoying that you didn't get your machine, and that people are profiteering from your misery via eBay, if Microsoft can quickly re-supply retailers, then it has a very successful launch on its hands.

I JUST WANTED to say how impressed I've been with the Xbox 360's 'blade' system and online connectivity. I now understand where the next gen is truly going. All the shiny graphics and the HDTV are lovely, but what I've been most impressed with is the multi-tasking that the 360 allows. Just the other day I was chatting to a friend on MSN while

"IN ORDER TO **NOT RUIN THE SURPRISE**, MY FAMILY TOOK **ADVICE** FROM THE 'RELIABLE' CHARTS. **I WON'T PICK ON ANY TITLE** IN PARTICULAR, BUT LET'S JUST SAY THAT **A FEW OF THE GAMES** I RECEIVED WERE **QUITE POOR**"



It's sickening to see incredible 360 titles like *Call Of Duty 2* on sale and not have a machine to play them on.



Next-generation beauties like Kameo are also going largely unplayed due to the Xbox 360 draught.

Making Contact

There are many wonderful ways to get in touch with games™. The traditional postal method is perfectly acceptable using the address below:

games™, Imagine Publishing Ltd, Richmond House, Richmond Hill, Bournemouth, BH2 6EQ

However, there are quicker ways to reach us thanks to the technological marvel that is the internet. Email us at this address: gamestm@imagine-publishing.co.uk





Yes, it's true – just like every year, the Christmas chart had several duffers in it. But then, you can't argue with popularity.



The number of people who've written to tell us just how great Xbox Live Arcade is… honestly, it's so many, we've started to lose count.

playing *Project Gotham* online against random Americans, and at the same time, chatting to my brother on his 360 using a separate chat com and listening to Kings Of Leon as a custom soundtrack. On a wireless pad. That, good sirs, is the future.
Jonny Henson

games™: Indeed it is. In fact, we've spent more time mucking about with the 360's front end than actually playing the 'proper' games. We particularly like the ability to nosey in on what your friends have been playing, and talking to them while playing separate games. It will be interesting if the PlayStation3 offers this 'home entertainment hub' system when it eventually launches.

XBOX LIVE ARCADE. Genius. I baulked at the idea of playing retro games on a machine capable of *PGR3*, but lo and behold, that's all I've been bloody well doing since I got the thing. With *Hexic* coming on the HD drive as well as *Gauntlet*, *Smash TV* and the sublime *Geometry Wars 2*, I actually can't drag myself away from it. As I write, I hear that Capcom is releasing *Street Fighter II: Hyper Fighting* with full Live play in the coming months. Brilliant. My only worry is that I will never want to play any of the games I've forked out 50 hard-earned pounds on.
Paul Rix

games™: We hear you. We're already spending far too much of our time doing exactly the same thing. Our *Geometry Wars* skills are now finely honed, and we can look forward to plenty more nostalgia in the future. As for worrying about not playing your 360 games? Well, if it's between *Smash TV* and *Perfect Dark Zero*, we know where we'll be.

WHY IS IT that games journalists always think that they invariably know better than their readers? Okay, so people who write about videogames for a living will likely have a broader experience of them and are (usually) blessed with the talent of articulating their views in an elaborate fashion, but why should their opinion be absolute? However informed you might be, a review of a game is never entirely objective. It will always be based on subjective experience. Why then not write about them subjectively instead of presenting readers with an 'absolute' review with no name at the bottom? This isn't the sort of thing that happens in other entertainment journalism, such as film and book criticism. I'd rather read a journalist who told me who they were, what they liked and why they did or didn't like a game, rather than a nameless, faceless entity whom I am expected to trust without knowing the slightest thing about their particular tastes.
Chris Clarke



CONTACT

ILLUMINATING THE WORLD OF games™

Enough of what we think, this is where you lot get to show off your rapier wit to praise, criticise or mock the games industry

Text Life

☐ What is up with you?
g™: Ooh, loads. Where would you like us to start? Between *Guitar Hero* and nearly losing our jobs, it's been a pretty hectic month.

☐ Your review score for *Mario Kart DS* is clearly wrong.
g™: Yes, and your face is wrong. We'd give it a seven. End of discussion. It's fun, but not the be all and end all of handheld gaming.

☐ 360 is like crack.
g™: That depends… crack's far easier to get hold of, as far as we know. Not that we *would* know, of course. Let's make that clear right now.

☐ What is your office gamertag?
g™: Stop pestering us for this kind of info… if we wanted to play Live against you, don't you think we'd be printing it on the cover for everyone to see?

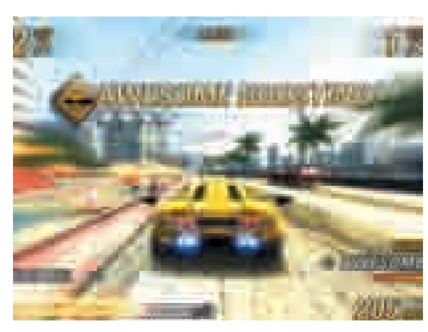
☐ Will the PS3 still come out in the Spring?
g™: That's up to Sony. We wouldn't bet on it… a launch toward the end of the year (in Japan) is looking far more likely.

☐ Peter Moore is sexy.
g™: You are, of course, incorrect. Not that being bald isn't sexy… it's just that we tend not to fancy men who look like the devil himself.

☐ Revolushun FTW.
g™: Really? Nintendo certainly kept that one quiet. Still, it'd make for an interesting add-on for the joypad, at least.

☐ Is your website broken?
g™: Good question and one that we'd love to answer… but we can't. Until we know more, you'll just have to sit tight. Sorry.

☐ I luvved your *Animal Crossing* cover.
g™: Why, thank you very much. We're glad you liked it. Too bad our exclusive got ruined by silly people – we've shouted at them loads.



■ Reviews are objective – if you don't agree with the score, that doesn't mean you're right and we're wrong. Learn to live with that, okay?



■ *Guitar Hero* – a game that deserves a European release if ever we saw one. Heck, we'll bring it over here ourselves if we have to.

games™: Wow, what a good point. We've never thought of that, and we've certainly never explained it before. Oh, hang on, we have. We appreciate that people like to familiarise themselves with reviewers and it gives a far more personal feel to a piece of writing, but these are the very reasons why our reviews remain nameless.

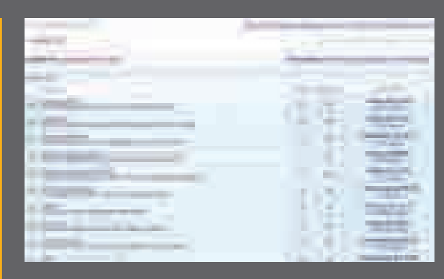
Our evaluations aren't 'absolute', they're our opinions – this is obvious, so stop being silly. The fact is, we're honest. If a game's worth a two, hell, it's going to have a big '2' stamped next to it; this honesty would be jeopardised if reviewers were hunted down by publishers, readers and forum members. It just leads to people championing the good games and giving middling, non-offensive scores to bad ones. That's the game we choose not to play and we're all the better for it.

☐ **THANK YOU FOR** your review of *Guitar Hero*. The price had been putting me off, but after reading your review in issue 40 (happy birthday, by the way), I finally purchased a £90 copy of the game from eBay and have been smiling ever since. I even went as far as bringing it home over Christmas where my family (old, young and universally inept at videogames) were all clamouring for a go on Boxing Day. Watching my aunt and ageing parents tearing it up to *Killer Queen* on Easy, I realised that this was the first game I had ever been able to play properly with my family; its appeal, for both hardcore gamers and the most casual of casuals, is astonishing. It would be absolutely criminal if it never got a UK release – surely we can start some sort of **games™** campaign?
Natasha Bradley

games™: We'd be amazed if the triumphant *Guitar Hero* didn't appear on these shores in the not-too-distant future. With the success of *SingStar* and the risible *Buzz!* over the Christmas period, plus more and more non-gamers beginning to make use of the PlayStation2, it's the perfect time to launch the greatest peripheral-based game ever made. Just don't expect to beat us on Symphony. It ain't going to happen.

☐ **UPON READING SOME** of your various articles on the effects of video game culture clashing and globalisation, it got me thinking about the Nintendo DS, which I believe is the most effected by this. The range of games on the DS over here is rather poor, and despite the excitement I had for the thing I still think it still hasn't quite achieved that killer app. Yet in Japan they have many fantastic games. I believe one of the reasons for this is that the Japanese culture naturally accepts the bizarre and experimental titles that are perfectly suited to the DS, while in the west we





FROM THE FORUM

PLAYSTATION3 EXPECTATIONS… OR THE LACK OF THEM

have more trouble getting to grips with it; all we seem to want is reality and then we end up with terrible ports like *Burnout Legends*.

Many Japanese developers see the creative potential for the DS and design inventive games such as *Ossu! Tatakae! Ouendan*, whereas over on the western side, developers have a hard time converting their franchises to accommodate the touch screen and extra screen (with poor results). The graphics and physics of the PSP however have perfect success in western franchise-converting (*GTA*, *Burnout*, *WipEout*). You can understand why the PSP seems to do so well.

Thanks to the DS being so import friendly, I have managed to get some of the cracking Japan only games for roughly £30. I just wish many western developers would either embrace the obscure, or create something original to really make use of the unique feature of the DS, as doing so would probably create some great games.

With this in mind, you can't help but think if the upcoming Revolution is in for a similar fate. Looking at them, the DS and the Revolution are both similar in ethos. But will Nintendo's quest for innovation work in the west or will I be forced to import (which will be a lot more difficult) or play *Need For Speed Revolution*, where the only way the controller is implemented is in an interactive menu? Let's hope it's not the latter, eh?

Luke Nicklin

games™: We can totally see your point, but you're not really considering the bigger picture. Can you imagine how badly something like *Ouendan* would do over here, despite the fact that it's an incredible game? We've lost count of the number of people who've given us strange looks after we've regaled them with tales of male cheerleaders in long trenchcoats… clearly, it's a Japanese thing. That's not to say that we're excusing developers for failing to make use of the DS's capabilities to the full – although that's always going to be the case in the infancy of a new format – but just the same, you have to consider the market each game is aiming for. There really are some good games out there, believe us… even if you do have to import from time to time.

NOW THAT THE initial furore surrounding the launch of the PSP has died down, I have been left feeling rather disappointed. As much as I loved *WipEout*, *GTA* and *Lumines*, I'm now left with a rather expensive screen and not a lot else. Why, you ask? Because no one is releasing anything worthwhile to play on the damn thing. I don't want poorly realised, rushed, second rate conversions of mediocre PS2 titles. At all. I want original games that take advantage of the machine's undoubted power. I don't want to watch movies on the damned thing; I've got a progressive scan DVD player. Surely I can't be the only one who is getting increasingly frustrated with the (extremely expensive) portable machine that gets less gaming use than my mobile phone?

Paul Ryan

games™: You might have something there, for sure – we don't watch films or listen to music on our PSPs either. But then, with games like *Tokobot* and *Katamari Damacy* taking up our time, why would we want to?

"I EVEN WENT AS FAR AS **BRINGING GUITAR HERO HOME** OVER CHRISTMAS WHERE MY FAMILY (YOUNG, OLD AND **UNIVERSALLY INEPT AT GAMES**) WERE **ALL CLAMOURING FOR A GO** ON IT OVER BOXING DAY. **MOST AMUSING**…"

Electric Boogaloo

So, what's everyone expecting? Considering this was announced at last year's E3 event, there's been sod all information about it since. Launch date in Japan should only be a few months away. To be honest, I don't think it's going to be the powerhouse we originally thought it would be after last year's E3. ATi recently hinted (well, they would do) that the RSX isn't as powerful as Sony had originally hoped, since it's an off-the-shelf PC part. We'll soon see, but even an off-the-shelf part such as RSX is damn powerful, and it worked fine for the original Xbox with NV3X.

PlayStation Portable connectivity will probably be high on Sony's list, with things like portable Tamagotchis being stored on the memory stick so people can carry things on elsewhere. Whether it goes as far as what's gone before is questionable, but I think Sony will be mad not to push this, considering it's connectivity options (Wi-Fi, USB).

So, any more predictions, or just expectations?

Super Stu

Is the development of PC GPU-controlled, or something? What intrigues me is that we're (PC gamers) used to the six month product cycle, where one gives us faster clocks and the next gives us a new core, and so on. One cycle never really 'shits' on the last, though; I mean, my 9800 pro seems about 50% faster than my gf4 in the same machine.

How come they can suddenly pull GPUs out of nowhere that make PCs look daft, if the blurb is to be believed? Sounds a bit wosnim to me.

In honesty, I've been a staunch Sony fan in the past, but these days I'm just a bit of a cynic. I can't even imagine where Sony is taking the PS3 or what it will actually have, because everything is shrouded in a veil of bullshit.

Jakeway

"Sony lie, and their build quality is shit. That's a fact. It's a thing we can't deny." – Katie Melua.

ATI said the GPU in the 360 is more powerful than the PS3's. I don't doubt they'll still get lots out of the PS3, look at the amazing stuff on the PS2. But the first year(s) of the PS2's life was very poor. It's only in the past three years that they've really got a lot out of it. In its early life all the games looked like they could be done on the Dreamcast.

I think Sony is using the PS3 to save money on the production costs of Blu-Ray Drives and Cell processors. After all, the more you make the cheaper it gets. Anyway, hardware specs aren't all that important. A console is only as good as its games, and if the PS3 is as hard to develop for as they say, we might see a shift in the all-games-on-one-platform development we've seen for the PS2.

Personally, I don't care about the PS3. I am more excited about the Revolution, by offering new ways to play they'll be offering new types of games as well.